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Turkey Faces East

New Orientations Toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union

Graham E. Fuller

Prepared for the
United States Air Force
United States Army

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PREFACE

Turkey's important role in the war against Iraq and its growing strategic involvement in the new politics of the Caucasus and Central Asia have kept Turkey in the forefront of Western strategic perceptions—even as Ankara's traditional role in the containment of Soviet power has evaporated. This study explores the roots of Turkey's Eastern orientation and the long-term prospects for Turkish relations with the Middle East and the Muslim areas of the former Soviet Union. The analysis treats the broad range of geopolitical, economic, and security issues that are emerging in these new regions and their influence on Turkey's own future strategic orientation. In addition to published sources, this study draws heavily on unattributed discussions with official and unofficial observers in Turkey, Europe, and the United States and on the author's first-hand observations during repeated trips both to Turkey and to Central Asia.

This Report is one of a series of five studies on Turkey's future geopolitical orientation. This study was conducted within the Strategy and Doctrine Programs of Project AIR FORCE and the Army Research Division's Arroyo Center. Project AIR FORCE and the Arroyo Center are two of RAND's federally funded research and development centers.

Ian O. Lesser's *Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West After the Cold War*, R-4204-AF/A, 1992, is a companion piece to this Report. Forthcoming reports will address domestic trends, Turkey's role in the Balkans, and the overall outlook for Turkey's new strategic role.

These papers are the constituent parts of "Turkey's Future Strategic Orientation: Implications for U.S. Interests and Policy," a joint Project AIR FORCE–Arroyo Center study sponsored by USAFE and the Air Staff (AF/XOXXE) and by the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (DAMI-FII), Department of the Army.

SUMMARY

The last decade of the twentieth century has brought unexpected and stunning changes to the entire world order, transforming geopolitical relations around the world. One of the countries most dramatically affected—indeed, living on the very borders of these changes—is Turkey.

Turkey therefore now finds itself living in a new world. Newly liberated Balkan states have emerged to the northwest—their numbers now multiplied with the subsequent breakup of Yugoslavia—and are now in the process of groping toward some new Balkan state system. Directly to the north, an independent Ukraine and a distinct new Russian entity are now present. To the northeast, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are now independent states in their own right, the latter two already engaged in intractable war. And in former Soviet Central Asia, five new states have appeared, four of them Turkic. Turkey will not only have direct relations with each one of these entities and states but will be likely drawn into complex and dangerous new interrelationships.

For Turkey, is it not merely a matter of relations with new states. Turkey, once isolated as the sole Turkish nation in the region, now is potential leader, or at least model, of the five new Turkic states that have emerged onto the international scene in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Even for those states that are not Turkic, such as Armenia, Georgia, and Tajikistan, Turkey is now a key regional power to be reckoned with. Virtually overnight, Turkey's influence and involvement now extend in a nearly unbroken belt from the Turks of the Balkans to the Turks of western China and eastern Siberia.

Turkey is also dauntingly challenged by new developments in the Middle East that touch it as never before in the modern era. The Middle East itself has also undergone major change with the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War and Iraq's bid for weapons of mass destruction, the breakaway of the Kurds in northern Iraq—thereby sharply affecting Turkey's own Kurds—and the beginnings of a serious Arab-Israeli peace process that could radically transform the politics of the region. Turkey is thus surrounded both by new opportunities and challenging new problems that will tax its capabilities and even its geopolitical vision of itself.

With all the changes in the external world, Turkey's internal situation has also undergone remarkable transformation over the past decade, especially under the stewardship of Prime Minister and later President Turgut Ozal, and continued under the leadership of Prime Minister Demirel. Key new trends affecting Turkish foreign policy include the following:

- Greatly increased commercial relations with the Middle East have broadened Turkish involvement in the region.
- Growing democratization inside Turkey affects public participation in foreign policy more than ever before, including articulation of interests by private Turkish business interests, Islamic-oriented politicians interested in ties with the Muslim world, Ataturkist elites, broad public opinion that is sympathetic for "Turkish brothers" around the world, and a handful of leftists who find value in Turkey's closer association with Third World nations than with Western "imperialist" states.
- An explicit and publicly articulated nationalist-separatist movement has emerged among Turkey's Kurds, raising new quandaries in Turkish society and the government about how to handle it. This open Kurdish nationalism in turn has helped spark new nationalism among the Turks themselves, further stimulated by a growing (and now permissible) interest in Turks in other parts of the world and in the glories of the old Ottoman Empire.

All of these trends have now opened the possibility for a more nationalist or even chauvinistic leadership to emerge in the future, especially if Turkey is unsuccessful in reaching some kind of accommodation with the new European Community; if Turkey's economy should take some sharp tailspin in the future, evoking radical policies; or if Turkey should face some impending loss of its Kurdish region in the southeast. It is important to note that these trends are only distant possibilities on the horizon at present, but cannot be excluded over the longer run, especially in view of the growth of objective conditions for their emergence. Above all else, the old isolationism that was part of the Ataturkist legacy in Turkish foreign policy for so many decades has now given way to a new activism that makes Turkish policies harder to predict.

In the Middle East, Turkey's long-standing cool relations with much of the Arab world may now undergo some change with the end of the Cold War. Many key Arab states drifted into client relationships with the Soviet Union lasting several decades, placing them onto an auto-

matic collision course with Turkey. Now Syria, and even Iraq, will no longer present the same ideological opposition but will still have serious bilateral conflicts with Turkey to work out. If the Arab-Israeli conflict can reach some kind of solution by the middle of the decade, Syrian-Turkish hostility can be expected to fade considerably. Turkey's relations with Iraq, however, are strained by rivalry for power in the region, by differing policies on the Kurdish problem, and by Iraq's quest for weapons of mass destruction which threatens Turkey and could eventually impel Turkey to move in the same direction. Turkey's trade with Iraq—now closed by sanctions—remains potentially very important to both states, except when atrophied by poor political relations.

Turkey's relations with Iran seem almost certainly headed for serious deterioration and even confrontation in the next decade, partly because of rivalry over influence in Central Asia but especially over Azerbaijan. The emergence of an independent Azerbaijan in the former USSR now threatens Iran with the loss of a major northern province, Iranian Azerbaijan, since these two regions can now contemplate the possibility of unity for the first time in over 170 years. While the ethnic loyalties of Iran's large Azeri population (nearly 25 percent of Iran's population) remain uncertain, most of the Azeris of independent Azerbaijan consider themselves to be part of the Turkic world and largely look to Turkey as their model. Although Turkey does not support any such breakaway movement in Iran, Turkey is increasingly showing greater sympathies for the "external Turks" of the world and will be perceived by Iran as abetting the partition of Iranian territory. Serious confrontation between the two states is thus quite likely and could extend to the two countries backing different sides of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. Even a united Azerbaijan is unlikely to seek political unity with Turkey, however.

Turkey's relations with Iran will also be affected by Iran's own relations with Iraq, a key long-term geopolitical rivalry in the region. Turkey will basically be unhappy with any improvement of the situation of the Kurds in Iraq, because it will lead to greater Kurdish autonomy there, raising expectations among Turkey's Kurds as well. Iran will surely seek to exploit the Kurdish situation in the event of hostility with either Iraq or Turkey.

Turkey's relations with Israel are likely to improve markedly in the event of a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Turkey could figure heavily in a peace settlement because of Ankara's offer to supply water (via a "peace water pipeline") to the states of the Gulf and Levant

in the event of peace. Turkey will have keen interest in trade with Israel and would seek to benefit from Israel's technological know-how.

In the Caucasus, Turkey is under increasing pressure to abandon a neutral role in the Armenian-Azerbaijani struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh and to take the Azerbaijani side. Such a position would lead to the polarization of the conflict in the region and probably draw Iran in as well—all in an area of major concern to Moscow. This particular conflict presents only unattractive alternatives to Turkey, but the regional stakes are sufficiently high that both the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and NATO mechanisms are becoming involved to limit the conflict.

In the newly emerging states of Central Asia, all of which are Turkic except for Tajikistan, Turkey is finding new opportunities for investment and trade, as well as for cultural and political influence, as the unofficial "center" of the Turkic world. These republics seek new relationships with any and all states that can help them develop; because of ethnic ties, however, Turkey is likely to enjoy some degree of privileged access but no guaranteed monopoly. Turkey is already moving more aggressively than any other state to establish a foothold in Central Asia and is prepared to make significant (for Turkey) financial commitments to the region. Demirel has already proposed the possible creation of a Union of Turkish States and the possibility of Central Asia leaving the ruble zone.

Turkey's relationships in the former Soviet Central Asia will also affect developments in China, where a large Chinese Turkic and Muslim population also exists that seeks separation from China. Turkey's policies in this regard will also affect Russian relations with China. Whatever Turkey's ties are with this region, there is obviously little prospect for physical expansionism.

Turkey's relations with Russia have also changed dramatically. With the end of the ideological struggle, neither country poses the same threat to the other as before. Russia of course remains the single great power near Turkey capable of defeating it, but scenarios for such a conflict are far harder to imagine today than they were only a few years ago. Ankara could well exert a moderating and sobering influence on the Central Asian states that Russia would find useful. On the other hand, rivalry is already emerging between Russia and Turkey over trade and influence in Central Asia and over Russian sensitivities to separatism among the large Turkic population (especially Tatars, Bashkirs, and Yakuts) within Russia itself. Russia is concerned that Turkish policies may be designed to supplant Russian political and economic influence in these Muslim republics.

Both Russian and Turkish policies will need to find a new equilibrium in this region.

In geopolitical terms, Turkey for years has almost been at the tail end of Europe. Today, Turkey is at the center of its own newly emerging world. New relations to the south, east, and north are developing that are becoming vital to Ankara's interests. Conversely, America's interests in the region, while still present, are of a considerably lesser order with the end of the Cold War. To that extent, Turkey is now likely to refer less to Washington's views in delineation of its own interests than it has in the past; similarly, the United States will probably have less influence over Turkey. That does not mean that Turkey will not be able to play a highly constructive and important role in the region, even from the U.S. viewpoint. Of all the models for development in the Muslim world today, Turkey's own positive accomplishments as a stable, secular, democratic, free-market state stand at the top of the list. It is important that Turkey also continue to play a key role in the European community to ensure that no new wall should emerge between "Christian" Europe and a Muslim Middle East. Such a potential gulf could serve as a powerfully negative basis for an intensified North-South struggle in the world in the decades ahead, in which Turkey might feel compelled to revert to a chauvinist and anti-Western position. Given Turkey's increasing geopolitical role across Asia, that eventuality would seem to be in no one's interests.

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1. TURKEY'S NEW EASTERN ORIENTATION

Turkey now lives in a new world. Within a few years of the advent of Gorbachev to power, Turkey's geopolitical environment began to be changed in three out of four directions of the compass: To the northwest, the emergence of truly independent Balkan states is now in the process of creating a new Balkan state system. Directly to the north, Turkey now has opportunity for direct relations by sea with a new independent Ukraine and a distinct new Russian entity. To the northeast, three new independent states have appeared on the scene in the Caucasus with whom Turkey has established direct relations: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Farther to the east, five new independent Muslim states have emerged in former Soviet Central Asia. Not only has Turkey acquired a whole set of new political relations with these entities, it will be hard put to avoid being drawn into complex new regional quarrels and conflicts that, in a few cases, have already moved into armed conflict.

Even to Turkey's south, while no new states have yet come into existence, a far more difficult situation has arisen in the Persian Gulf, with the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein's bid for regional power and his quest for weapons of mass destruction, and the potential breakup of Iraq. And an Arab-Israeli peace process—far more promising than anything that has emerged in the past before—also may open possibilities of new relations between Turkey and the Arab world to the south. Turkey is thus surrounded by new opportunities and potential new problems—all of which pose extraordinary new and complex challenges for Turkey.

All of these challenges have come at a time when Turkey itself has hardly been standing still: The eighties probably brought sharper change to Turkey than perhaps any time since Ataturk founded the new Turkish secular nation-state on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

In a period when chaos will predictably be a major feature of political events in the Balkans and among the republics of the former Soviet Union—not to mention in the Middle East—the international system benefits from a nation whose stability and track record for international prudence are by and large impressive. (In this context, I would view the Cyprus issue as a major exception. Turkey, rightly or wrongly, chose to move unilaterally rather than in conjunction with international instruments to influence the course of that crisis.)

2. THE IMPACT OF TURKISH DOMESTIC CHANGE ON FOREIGN POLICY

If changes in the international climate have been dramatic, so have the rapid developments in Turkey's own domestic situation over the past decade. Potential geopolitical changes in Turkey's foreign policy can only be understood in this context.

Turkish politics had in fact already begun to change well in advance of the Gorbachev revolution. Turgut Ozal, first as Minister of State for the Turkish economy, later as Prime Minister, and finally as President, has arguably been one of the most influential political figures on the Turkish scene since Ataturk. By the time of Gorbachev's ascendance, Ozal had already helped bring about a profound reorientation of Turkish domestic policies, particularly in the economic arena. These policies have exerted direct influence on Turkey's foreign policy as well. While these new policy departures came into existence primarily under the influence of Ozal, their roots had actually been slowly forming for a long time. But Ozal has been the primary catalyst—a remarkable, if controversial and flawed, figure.

The first area of major change lies in the rapidly advancing process of democratization within the country. The origins of active democratic politics go back to the opening of the political process by President Inonu, leading to the first open elections in 1955. A more populist government and a more open economy emerged during the Menderes presidency in the late 1950s. The progress toward democracy faltered with the military interventions of 1960, 1970, and 1980, which were based on the fear of the military's top leadership that the country was drifting away from the principles of Ataturkism and toward anarchy. These political interventions have been very controversial within Turkey, and the military's motives have been both positively and negatively assessed by differing parts of the Turkish political and social spectrum.

Whatever the wisdom of military intervention on each occasion, Turkish democracy in practice has emerged more vigorously after each intervention, regardless of the laws passed in the immediate aftermath of the coups. Turkey has quite simply been growing more accustomed to the practice of democracy, the competition of political parties, and the steady broadening of the political spectrum. This gradual evolution toward ever greater democratic practice, while far from complete, strengthens Turkey's standing in the West, where

democracy is perceived as a fundamental value. Today, it is the only Muslim country in the Middle East that has regularly witnessed the defeat of party governments in elections and the smooth passage to power of the new victorious party—surely a fundamental criterion of the viability of democracy. Ankara is aware that any weakening of democratic practice at home simply makes it harder for the Western world to deal closely with Turkey.

Today, Turkish democracy, while incomplete, is creating a society far more open to discussion of once-forbidden ideological taboos, such as communism, Islam, and the Kurdish issue. While these debates are controversial, and even divisive, they ultimately serve to broaden and strengthen the Turkish political system and increase the overall stability of the country.

The second, and perhaps even more radical, internal change in Turkey is in the economic sphere: the abandonment under Ozal's direction of nearly 70 years of statist policies and a reversion to an open-market economy. Statism had already begun to be tempered in the Menderes era, but was not seriously challenged until Ozal's stewardship over the economy in the early 1980s. These policies not only brought an extraordinary surge of growth to the Turkish economy, but lent it an international orientation that has direct affect on Turkish foreign policy. Turkey particularly began to see opportunities for major new markets in the Middle East with the advent of the petrodollar boom in the 1970s. The Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s greatly enhanced Turkey's foreign trade with the Muslim world, as both of those countries became deeply dependent upon Turkey for transit access to the West and for Turkish consumer goods. Turkey's growing economic interests in the Middle East inevitably raised Turkish political consciousness toward Middle Eastern politics as well.

Turkey's new export-oriented policies sharply increase its interest not only in the Middle East but in the newly independent economies of the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the emerging independent republics of the Soviet Union. Most of all, new economic interests whetted Turkish interest in Western Europe itself, where Ankara views the frustrating quest for integration into the European Community (EC) to be a prime foreign-policy goal with immense political implications for Turkey. This opening up of Turkish economic policies—partially akin to the process of perestroika in the Soviet Union or the *infitah* (or economic opening) in Egypt—has still not attained all its goals, however; the process of Turkish privatization in particular has slowed in recent years.

However, Turkey now also possesses a quite unprecedented international perspective in its economic orientation. Whereas foreign policy had long been the exclusive preserve of a narrow, highly skilled and educated foreign-policy elite, Turkey's current external economic interests serve to widen the base of foreign-policy formulation and to interject broader elements of public opinion into the process. This process is still under way, although it is typically resisted by the foreign policy professionals—as in nearly all countries.

The greater popularization of foreign policy does not, of course, automatically lead to stability of the foreign-policy process. Public opinion is usually far more fickle and nationalistic than is the foreign-policy establishment in most countries; it is quite possible that the sobriety that has so long characterized Turkish foreign policy will be increasingly affected by other domestic interests and emotions. These interests include economic and commercial goals that the business community might urge upon Turkish foreign policy, Islamic groups and sentiments that introduce an "Islamic factor" into Turkish foreign policy, nationalist/neo-pan-Turkist impulses that increase Turkish interest in the Turkic world to the East, and potential emotional resentment toward a Western Europe that denies Turkey entry into the EC and otherwise offends the Turkish sense of dignity in passing judgment on Turkey's internal politics (such as constant dwelling on human-rights issues and on the Kurds). Popular opinion now plays a greater role in Turkish foreign policy than ever before in the history of the republic.

Lastly, in a world in which major reevaluations of national interests are under way in nearly every country with the end of the Cold War—starting in Russia and stretching to the United States—Turkey may also need to reconsider the character of its national interests in new ways. Here, the democratic process in Turkey will liberate this process of policy reformulation. Already, much of the revered Atatürkist tradition—so valuable and critical to the national survival in an earlier era of Turkish history—is now coming under reexamination.¹ With a lessening of some Atatürkist values—statism, isolationism, elitist paternalism, avoidance of Islamic and pan-Turkic ideological interests—such factors as nationalist/pan-Turkist, and Islamic ideologies have greater room for influence. Neither of these ideological tendencies can be described as purely negative or positive in itself: The wisdom and efficacy of such policies

¹Hugh Pope, "Legacy of Turkey's 'Immortal' Atatürk Slowly Starts to Fade," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 1991.

depend entirely on the wisdom, moderation, and skill with which they are implemented.

REEMERGING ETHNICITY IN TURKEY: KURDS AND TURKS

Much of the world is undergoing ethnic upheaval as a result of the sweeping political changes of the late 1980s. First, the collapse of communism has brought about the liberation of many countries whose nationalist development was frozen under communism—most notably in Eastern Europe and among the Soviet republics. The emergence of neonationalist movements in these states is releasing nationalist aspirations, passions, and rivalries formerly submerged—and inspiring others outside the old communist system. Secondly, the spread of the values of both democracy and human rights is making it both easier to express nationalist and separatist aspirations and more difficult for the West to ignore and deny these aspirations. Few countries are likely to remain untouched by this process. Turkey is no exception.

The Kurdish problem in Turkey's southeast, the country's most prominent ethnic issue, was the first to be reawakened in the new environment. The Kurds had long been suppressed in Turkey whenever they sought the status of a distinct ethnic element. Turkey's ethnic policies have never recognized the existence of a minority; an individual's ethnic origins were traditionally irrelevant to success or failure as long as they were never publicized. As a "Turk," a Kurd could rise to the highest places within Turkish society and the governing structure.²

The Kurdish problem had grown more prominent in Turkey over the previous decade, however. First, the Iran-Iraq war dragged Kurdish guerrilla elements in Iran and Iraq into the conflict, inevitably touching the Kurdish population of Turkey as well. Saddam Hussein's gassing of his own Kurdish population in this war raised further international concern. At the end of the war, Saddam Hussein unleashed vast operations of retribution against Kurdish villages and populations, leading to the death and disappearance of tens of thousands of people. The radical liberation organization of Turkish Kurds,

²Turkish Presidents Cevdet Sunay and Turgut Ozal are only two prominent examples; Turkey's current Foreign Minister, Hikmet Cetin, is also a Kurd. Large numbers of Turkey's intellectuals, artists, and writers are also ethnic Kurds—the internationally known writer Yasar Kemal being the most famous—although not all have openly identified themselves as such. Many more Turks have mixed Turkish-Kurdish blood.

the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), began to gain prominence in this period. This was particularly due to Baghdad's lack of control over northern Iraq, from which the PKK operated into Turkey, and to Syrian support for PKK training camps in Lebanon. Kurds from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq have increasingly found greater opportunity to meet each other outside the region, particularly in Western Europe, not only exchanging ideas and gaining a greater sense of solidarity among themselves but also starting to propagate their ideas and publications. They also began to express their grievances to the EC, sparking a greater interest among Europeans in the plight of Kurds; Turkey as a fellow NATO member was particularly vulnerable to criticism in this respect.

The Gulf War in 1991 was the ultimate catalyst, highlighting more than ever before the existence and predicament of the Kurds as a whole, especially as Saddam moved once again to crush any Kurdish resistance to his regime. These actions inspired the U.S.-led international interventionary expedition to carve out a safe haven for Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq. As many as 500,000 Kurds took refuge over the Turkish border in this period, bringing the problem home to Turkey more than ever before.

Faced with this overwhelming refugee problem and its destabilizing character for Turkish Kurdistan, Western troops under United Nations command in southeastern Turkey inaugurated Operation Provide Comfort in the spring of 1991 to help feed the massive Iraqi Kurdish refugee population. But the presence of these troops and their carving out of a security zone in northern Iraq free of Iraqi control awakened anxieties and even suspicions among Turks themselves, who began to feel particularly vulnerable to Western criticism of Turkey's handling of the whole issue, despite the promptness of Ankara's response. Many Turks were concerned that the presence of Iraqi Kurdish refugees on Turkish soil would only intensify feelings of Kurdish nationalism and separatism among Turkish Kurds. Other Turks wondered whether the foreign troop presence, particularly the British, was not specifically designed to intensify Kurdish separatism in the region. Those of a suspicious turn of mind recalled that the British had allegedly incited a Kurdish uprising against Ankara in 1925 to weaken Turkey's bargaining position for the oil-rich territories once part of the Ottoman Empire and then part of British Iraq. Still others suggested that the Europeans, especially the British, do not want Turkey in the EC, are anti-Turkish by nature, and see the Kurdish issue as a way to weaken Turkey and even cause territorial loss; an emerging Kurdish separatist state would then allow the European powers to better control the region and even to gain control

over the rich oil resources of Mosul. Some leftists even suggested that the United States provoked the Kurds, then allowed them to be defeated and flee into Turkey as a means of weakening Turkish resistance to a Kurdish state and opening the way to a U.S. role as local gendarme.³ However dubious some of these arguments seem today, there can be little doubt that these techniques were part of the British and European imperial experience during the age of colonialism in the Middle East. Today, Western Europe is still seized with the Kurdish issue, particularly Germany. Turkish friction with Bonn has grown over this issue, and Ozal himself has criticized the Germans publicly for their apparent willingness to allow the PKK to operate at will out of Germany.⁴ Turkish suspicion of European ulterior motives in this respect—much less of American motives—has not yet been laid to rest.

Confronted with the brewing crisis of Kurds inside both Iraq and Turkey, Ozal took a bold policy gamble that has been deeply controversial within Turkish politics. He proposed legislation that would repeal a law forbidding the use of the Kurdish language in Turkey and began to openly address the issue of possible Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq; these policies were immediately implemented by the new Prime Minister, Suleyman Demirel, in late 1991. An unprecedented investigation into problems of the "Southeast"—a euphemism for the Kurdish question—had also been undertaken by the Socialist Peoples Party (SHP) in the previous year, serving not only to legitimize recognition of the existence of a huge ethnic minority in Turkey but also to address the problem of potential Kurdish separatism and the measures that Turkey should undertake to ameliorate the root causes of the problem.

The handling of the Kurdish situation in Turkey had impressively shifted by late summer 1991. Once, the word *Kurd* could not be found in public print. Today, the word regularly appears in the Turkish press. Bookstores carry textbooks in Turkish on how to learn Kurdish; other books are available in Kurdish: Kurdish poetry, tradi-

³See *Briefing*, 24 April 1991 and 6 May 1991. The author also heard numerous arguments to this effect raised during a research trip to Turkey in September 1991. See also Mehmet Arif Demirel, "British Desire to Resurrect the Sevres," *The Turkish Times*, 15 November 1991, for a discussion of serious distortions in the British media of the facts about the Kurdish case before the League of Nations. For a typical leftist interpretation, see the analysis of Dogu Perincek in Metin Sever, *Kurt Sorunu: Aydinlarimiz Ne Dushunuyor [How Our Intellectuals Look at the Kurdish Issue]*, Cem Yayinevi, Istanbul, 1992, p. 213.

⁴"Ozal: 'Germany Protects Marxist PKK Terrorists,'" *The Turkish Times*, 15 November 1991.

tional tales, and histories of the great Kurdish uprisings during Ataturk's time, lauding the heroic leaders of these movements. There are even bilingual, left-wing publications carrying articles with such provocative titles as "The Turkish State, in Pursuit of Expansionist Goals, Attacks Southern Kurdistan" and "Kurdistan Cannot Advance Under an Exploitative Administration."⁵ Newspapers too, are now available on the streets in Kurdish.

Despite all these developments, Ozal himself took many further substantial steps toward opening up the Kurdish Pandora's box. He permitted the establishment of a de facto autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, opened up direct and regular contacts with the two key Iraqi Kurdish groups who have now openly visited Ankara on several occasions,⁶ and, most importantly, acquiesced to elections in northern Kurdistan that represent a major step toward de facto independence. Prime Minister Demirel, now Ozal's "successor" as the key policy figure in Ankara, has in effect bargained with the Iraqi Kurdish guerrilla movements to grant them some status and freedom of action in return for an explicit statement—for what it is worth over the longer run—that they do not seek an independent state in Iraq and an agreement to constrict the activities of the PKK—a movement openly dedicated to the liberation of Turkish Kurdistan. Demirel has even permitted the Iraqi Kurds to open an office in Ankara. Many Turks believe that Ozal was extremely foolish in allowing the Kurdish issue to evolve to this extent, perhaps creating the prospect of an eventual autonomous or even separatist movement among the Turkish Kurds themselves.⁷

Ozal has apparently been playing for possibly even greater stakes. In the eyes of some political observers,⁸ Ozal might have a geostrategic vision of the future of the Kurdish movement, which he will never explicitly articulate, because it is simply too volatile. That vision would foresee the ultimate "inevitability" of Kurdish separatism in the region as a whole, most likely beginning in Iraq. If Turkey can now play a sympathetic role toward the establishment of an independent or autonomous Kurdish state in Iraq, there is a good likelihood that that state would look to Turkey as the "natural center of

⁵Denge, August 1991, pp. 2 and 18. The other books were noted by the author in Turkish bookstores in September 1991.

⁶See *Briefing*, 18 March 1991.

⁷See, for example, Aydin Yalcin, "Turkiye'yi ve Turklugu Dusunuyorsak" ["Thinking about Turkey and Turkishness"], *Yeni Forum*, April 1991, and "Ozal's Links With Kurdish Rebels Come Under Press Fire," *Turkish Times*, 10 October 1991.

⁸These conclusions are based in part on the author's interviews with numerous Turkish journalists, academics, and politicians in September 1991 and June 1992.

gravity" of the Kurdish-speaking world. Not only do the majority of the world's Kurds live in Turkey—perhaps 12 million out of 20 million scattered throughout Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and the USSR—but the Turkish Kurds are the most advanced, least tribalized, and already play a major role in Turkish society—especially the Kurds who live in the population centers of western Turkey. Under these circumstances, if there were ever to be a united Kurdish state, or even aspirations toward eventually creating one, Turkey would have the dominant voice and power over it. Such a creation would give Turkey a great deal of influence in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Iran. Under any circumstances, so goes the rationale, Turkey is better off getting out ahead of such a movement than it is resisting the inevitable, which would only establish Turkey as the key enemy of a future Kurdish power. (See Section 3, for further discussion of the Kurdish problem in the context of Turkish relations with Iraq.)

Most Turks currently consider the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region in Turkey—much less an independent state—as extremely undesirable and probably unacceptable. The Turkish General Staff has historically seen itself as the historical guarantor of the territorial integrity of Turkey and reportedly is strongly dedicated to the preservation of the unitary Turkish state above all else, regardless of whatever cultural and economic concessions are made to the Kurds. If the Kurdish situation began to spiral out of hand, the military would almost surely find that issue a greater impetus for intervention than almost any other issue in many decades. Ankara's politicians thus have to walk a fine line and keep the potential for violence under control. In the meantime, the General Staff is likely to exercise its own authority in deciding how to deal with military aspects of the insurrection and guerrilla border crossings in the south-east.

Under any circumstances, the issue is now out on the table and will undergo more intensive debate in the future. The political lines have not yet been clearly drawn, although the nationalist parties of Alpaslan Turkes and Bulent Ecevit are dedicated to the preservation of the unitary state. Ozal's former party, the Motherland Party, which once supported Ozal's liberal Kurdish policies, now tends opportunistically to attack Demirel for pursuing those same policies. Demirel's coalition partners, the Social Democratic Peoples Party, are most liberally of all inclined toward the Kurds and at one time housed within the party the embryo of a Kurdish nationalist party. Islamists are ambivalent: They tend to look tolerantly at the idea of Kurdish autonomy, since they oppose in principle the idea that the Turkish

state should be founded on the basis of ethnicity; on the other hand, they do not support separation on the basis of ethnicity either.⁹

While Ozal's reasoning on the Kurdish problem is imaginative and forward looking, there is no guarantee that he is right that Turkey could hope to have a dominant influence over a Kurdish state in the region over the longer run or that Turkey's interests might not suffer grievously in the process. His forthright approach to the problem is, in the eyes of most Turks, premature to say the least and probably contributed significantly to the downfall of his party in the October 1991 elections. Indeed, Ozal's own liberal policies are partially suspect because of his own Kurdishness. Reasonable alternatives are few, however, which is why the Demirel coalition government, on purely pragmatic grounds, has not been able to pursue significantly different policies at this point, despite its unease.

A NEW TURKISH NATIONALISM?

A new sense of ethnicity may now be emerging among the Turks themselves. This trend has been provoked by the events around them, most notably the growth of outspoken Kurdish nationalism and the ground swell of ethnicity and separatism in other countries. A strong sense of clearly defined nationalism has been a distinctive feature of modern Turkey ever since its emergence as a nation-state and since Ataturk instilled new nationalist pride.¹⁰ But Ataturk's political vision of the new Turkish state was based quite narrowly on the Turks within the boundaries of modern Turkey.

Today, as Turks watch the reemergence of Turkish communities from Yugoslavia to Iraq, China, and Siberia, their press notes that, for example, Turkish is the "fifth most widely spoken language in the world," according to UNESCO.¹¹ It is now commonly repeated in Turkey that the 21st century will be the "century of the Turks," a phrase repeated by the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev during a visit to Turkey in September 1991.¹² All this contributes to a growing awareness—in a society not very used to talking about such things—of the diversity and richness of the

⁹Sever, op. cit., pp. 96 and 148.

¹⁰Prior to the emergence of the modern Turkish state, the very word "Turk" in the Ottoman Empire was frequently used pejoratively and tended to denote a rude peasant or Asiatic Turk.

¹¹Ali Fuat Ulay, "Turkish Fifth Most Widely Spoken Language," *Turkish Times*, 1 October 1991. This figure lumps all Turkic languages of the world into one group.

¹²See Murat Arvas, "İstikbal Türklerin [The Future Belongs to the Turks]," *Türkiye*, 25 September 1991.

Turkish community in the world. Because of the strategic danger from the Soviet Union ever since Turkey's foundation, Turkish policy traditionally discouraged and even punished any academic or other expression of public interest in the Turks of the rest of the world, especially in the Soviet Union. But, in fact, the present population of Turkey is made up in part of offspring—sometimes only second generation—of Turks of diverse geographical origins, from settlers in all parts of the Ottoman, Russian, and Chinese Empires: the Balkans, the Arab world, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Chinese Turkestan. In 1991, for the first time ever, Turks began to start talking about their own various geographical origins as Turks from diverse areas.¹³ This phenomenon has strengthened feelings of the diverse character of "Turkishness" and a growing awareness of the richness of legacy of old Empire—but a distinct pride in being a Turk. From another point of view, the emergence of Kurdish nationalist—even separatist—views in Turkey is leading to a backlash by Turks that could negatively affect the relatively harmonious ethnic relations that have existed in Turkey in the modern period (apart from the treatment by security forces of those Kurds living in the border areas of southeastern provinces affected by PKK activities).

In short, the Kurdish issue is out on the table; during the fall 1991 election campaign, nearly every single political party had to take some kind of a position on the Kurdish problem, sometimes still referred to more delicately as the "southeast issue." Nearly all parties explicitly recognized that the issue could not be solved by force, but only by recognizing the economic needs of the area, reforming the present military rule of the region, and introducing greater democracy into the region. An avowedly Kurdish party, the Populist Toilers Party (HEP), actually ran in the elections in association with the Social Democratic Peoples Party and gained an unprecedented 22 seats in the Parliamentary elections. A high proportion of those elected are considered to be radicals, many of whom had spent time in Turkish prisons in an earlier era.¹⁴

The Turkish authorities are deeply concerned that the PKK may now attempt to spread its revolutionary violence to other parts of the country, the major cities of Western Turkey where there are also large Kurdish populations. Incidents have already occurred that served to whip up ethnic hostility between Kurds and Turks that could grow more serious and affect tensions in the southeast as well.

¹³Interviews with sociologists in Istanbul, September 1991.

¹⁴William D. Montalbano, "Surge in Kurdish Nationalism Poses Tough Test for New Turkish Regime," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1991.

The PKK, which from its inception has spouted a Marxist-Leninist line, is resolved on a serious course of separatism and has not hesitated to use violence to achieve its ends in a mounting cycle of actions. Between 50 and 100 have died monthly in PKK-related violence; in the last seven years, some 3,300 people have died in a guerrilla process that has some overtones of guerrilla action during the Vietnam war: Villagers intimidated by the PKK are forced to cooperate with them to a limited extent, only then to be brutalized by Turkish military forces or unofficial death squads seeking to crush PKK activities and intimidate the population from supporting them.¹⁵ The largest raid to date took place in late October when a PKK battalion of 400 PKK rebels killed 17 Turkish soldiers near the Iraqi border, sparking Turkish air raids against suspected guerrilla bases inside northern Iraq.¹⁶

NEO-OTTOMANISM

The Ottoman period, of course, has always been treated extremely negatively in the Atatürkist vision. To the Atatürkist elite, it represented decline, capitulation to the West, the undue influence of non-Turkish nationalities within the Empire, absence of democracy, and the excessive power of state Islam. There has historically been little room for an "objective" view of the Ottoman past in contemporary elitist thinking.

During the eighties, however, some reconsideration of the Ottoman past began on the part of intellectuals of the left and right—but not among those in the mainstream. Rightists, in part influenced by Islamic fundamentalist thinking, found grounds for pride in the accomplishments of the Empire, especially in its greatest period of vigorous expansionism. The left was inclined to trace the roots of the struggle against Western imperialism from the late days of the Empire and found anti-Western, antiimperialist heroes among the reformers and nationalists of the period.

A broader reexamination of the Ottoman period now seems to be under way today. Apart from a greater willingness to think objectively about the non-Atatürkist past, the very reemergence of much of the territory of the old Empire in the Balkans and the Caucasus now fo-

¹⁵Montalbano, *op. cit.*

¹⁶Hugh Pope, "17 Turkish Troops Die in Kurds' Biggest Raid," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1991.

cuses new attention on the Turkish past in those regions and the period of Turkish interests and involvements there.¹⁷

These newer, more revisionist views—still far from widespread—do not represent a wholesale rejection of Atatürk, but rather a recognition that not every idea and value of Atatürk has to be forever valid in Turkish consideration of the future. The Atatürkist tradition itself is thus undergoing some revisionism, bringing with it a more objective treatment of the past rather than forever maintaining an uncritical Atatürkist ideology intact.¹⁸

This reexamination and reevaluation of Ottoman history in no way implies the emergence of a new Turkish irredentism or expansionism. It does suggest, however, a renewed interest in the former territories and people of the Empire, which includes Muslims who were part of that Empire. It suggests that certain organic geopolitical, cultural, and economic relations may reemerge in the new “normal” regional environment that had been absent during the “abnormal” period of Cold War polarization. It suggests that the Turks may now come to see themselves once again at the center of a world reemerging around them on all sides rather than at the tail-end of a European world that is increasingly uncertain about whether or not it sees Turkey as part of itself.

This change in Turkish outlook will come only slowly, especially in formal Turkish foreign policy, for it runs against resistance from seventy years of Turkish history and the foreign policy legacy of Turkey's great founder. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Turkey will forever spurn a greater regional role—in all directions of the compass—for that role provides a greater avenue for Turkey to fulfill its role of regional great power.

There has been some discussion in Turkey as to whether Turkey might not now bear some special responsibility for taking an interest in the old areas of empire, at least in the Balkans, now that they are independent, and, more to the point, at war with each other. This

¹⁷See, for example, Osman Okyar, “Tarihe Bakışlarımız Yumusuyor Mu?” [“Are our Views on History Softening?”] *Yeni Forum*, August 1991. Also see Murat Belge, *Tarihten Guncellige* [From History to Contemporaneity], Alan Yayincilligi, Istanbul 1983, for an original and provocative left-wing view of Ottoman history and its contribution.

¹⁸In his time, of course, Atatürk had every reason to denigrate the old multinational Empire and to focus on the need to create a new nation-state concept in Turkey that would find national fulfillment within new national borders and in a new ethnic, secularist, nationalist tradition. But now that the new nation-state is a firm reality, there may be greater freedom to examine the past with less anxiety and greater self-confidence and objectivity.

view would perhaps justify special concern for the Muslims of the Balkans as victims of Serbian depredations during the Yugoslav civil war. This view would also distinguish between the Balkans, as ex-empire, and Central Asia, which has never been part of the Ottoman Empire. While there is undoubtedly historical interest in the Balkans because of their status as a former part of the empire—and hence much more familiar to Turks—an interest in Central Asia is justified on the quite different and quite legitimate grounds of its Turkish ethnicity. There is unlikely to be significant difference in Turkish policy treatment of the two areas for any historical reason.

The defeat of the Motherland Party in Turkey's elections of October 1991 will, however, partially slow the pace of change that has characterized so much of Turkish policy over the past decade. Indeed, the electorate had many grievances against Ozal—inflation, nepotism, and an often high-handed style—that brought his party down despite the remarkable accomplishments of the past decade and the revolutionary new concepts introduced into Turkish policy, both foreign and domestic. It is almost as if the electorate had grown weary of the pace, and of the controversy, and sought change, even if it meant a return to some of the less imaginative, more traditional thinking of an earlier decade. Turkey, somewhat like Margaret Thatcher's England, seems to have been ready for a breathing space, a respite. But the new concepts introduced into the Turkish body politic are likely to be permanent, even if a slowing of the pace occurs. The reality of the political changes in the world around it indicates that these new horizons of foreign policy cannot be ignored by any new leader.

3. TURKEY AND THE ARABS

Any observer of the Middle East cannot help but be struck by the sharp differences between Arabs and Turks in their political orientation on a broad variety of international issues. Turkey has consistently aspired to be part of the West after the founding of the Turkish republic in the 1920s. It has identified itself with Western security institutions and has eschewed any kind of membership in Third World "anti-imperialist fronts" or nonaligned groupings. It has generally set itself sharply apart from the hostile anti-Western character of much of Arab politics.

Differences between Turkey and the Arab states reveal interesting aspects of the problems of the region: Given Turkey's clear Muslim character and culture and its good ties with the West, friction between the Muslim world and the West cannot be laid at the door of "Islam." It is the differences between Turkey and the Arab states that provide insights into the character of Turkey's future political and geopolitical orientation—and why the Arab world, or Iran, differs from Turkey in so many respects.

A discussion of the differences between Turkey, the Arab world, and Iran involve a multitude of cultural, historical, and social factors, but a few of the key elements can be summarized as follows:

- Turkey has had a long history of rule in the region: Turks have been conquerors and administrators of empire in diverse places nearly from their first appearance on the stage of world history. Persians and Arabs, on the other hand, over the last millennium, have generally been the ruled, rather than the rulers, dominated either by Turks or by Western imperialist states. This has had an important psychological impact on their sense of "victimization" in history.¹

¹Interestingly, even Turkey, for all its centuries of wielding power, also has tended to think of itself as a "loser" vis-à-vis the West for the last several centuries, as the Ottoman Empire fell apart and Western imperialist powers even attempted to truncate modern Turkey in its early days. Ozal recently commented (and revealingly) about Turkey's great economic successes and increased stature in the world over the last decade: "Turkey is marching towards becoming a regional superpower. Thank God, the inferiority complex we have suffered before the Western world for 300 years has ended." *The Turkish Times*, 15 November 1991.

- Since attaining its complete independence as a new nation-state in the 1920s, Turkey has no longer been threatened by Western Europe (except as part of the general danger of fascism to all of Europe before World War II). Most Arab states continued to languish under colonialism and imperialism until well after World War II and, in the Persian Gulf, until as late as the 1970s. Various Arab states have also suffered from Western armed intervention in one sense or another right down to the Gulf War of 1991. Turkey has not suffered this fate.
- Turkey has been immediately threatened over the centuries by Russian power, both Czarist and Bolshevik. As a result, Turkey turned to the West to make common cause to protect itself from this threat. The direct Soviet threat to the Arab world was always minimal (although there was often a significant proxy threat from radical Soviet client states). Indeed, actual armed attack on the Arab states came consistently and solely from the West itself.
- The creation of Israel, supported fully by the West, was a direct threat to the Arab world, both in terms of territory directly lost and the resulting armed conflict in which the Arabs invariably lost. Israel posed no such direct problem to Turkey.
- Whereas the Arab world provided a natural network of alliances and alignments to the Arab states, Turkey had no "natural" allies in terms of states consistently close to Turkey or sharing close ethnic or other cultural values. Turkey was "on its own" and more inclined to look further afield for its political associations, either to the equally isolated Northern Tier states or to the West.
- Because Turkey had allied itself with the West for the reasons stated above, it naturally fell afoul of most of its Arab neighbors, who perceived Ankara as serving interests directly hostile to many of the general interests of the Arabs. This conflict of interests tended to perpetuate and reinforce itself over decades.

Thus, Turkey has maintained a posture of exceptional aloofness toward most of the Arab world until the mid-1970s. Other historic reasons impinged as well from the Turkish point of view:

- Anger at the Arab populations that had rebelled against Ottoman Turkey (traitors to the Empire) during World War I
- A Turkish desire to disassociate itself from the former non-Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire and especially from the Arab world, which so powerfully symbolized the Islamic heritage that Atatürk sought to reject

- Border disputes with Syria in which Syria enjoyed the support of most Arab countries
- Turkish rejection of Arab state radicalism that was implicitly anti-Western and often gravitated toward the Soviet Union—Turkey's main geostrategic threat.

Lastly, while Turkish intellectuals speak knowledgeably and rationally about most areas of the world, when talk turns to the Arab world, a high proportion of them have recourse to visceral and almost racial denigration in stereotyping Arabs as "dirty," "lazy," and "untrustworthy." The emotionalism that tinges the Turkish view of the Arabs—more than it does their view of any other nationality except perhaps the Greeks—in part reflects Turkey's visceral desire not to be associated in any way with anything Middle Eastern. The researcher who says he is in Turkey because he is interested in Middle Eastern politics is quickly informed that he is in the wrong place.

These ingrained prejudices notwithstanding, Turkish policies toward the Arab world began to be revised somewhat during the 1970s as Turkish policymakers grew unhappy with many aspects of American policy toward Turkey—especially American criticism of Turkey's Cyprus policy.² Politically, the Turks were frustrated by the support that Athens seemed regularly able to draw from the Arab and Muslim countries in the UN on the Cyprus issue, while Turkey, itself a Muslim state, could not. Improved ties with the Arab world, it was hoped, might moderate the Arab states' pro-Greek posture on the Cyprus problem. (The Arabs in turn often opposed Turkey on Cyprus because of Turkish recognition of Israel.) At least as importantly, Turkey was attracted by the growing petroleum-based wealth of the Arab world and sought to establish new commercial relations with many of those states. Turkey began to export workers to the Persian Gulf and to land major construction contracts in various parts of the Arab world.

Ozal had even greater impact on Turkey's economic and strategic view of the Middle East beginning in the early 1980s. Two factors influenced his thinking: First, the emergence of an export-oriented economic policy lent even greater weight to ties with the Arab states. Second, Ozal's personal interest in facilitating the restoration of a more Islamic emphasis in Turkish life led to an interest in improved relations with other Muslim states, including the Arabs.

²Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1983.

Not all elements of the Turkish population have shared an antipathy toward the Arab world. Those of Islamic inclination in Turkey have generally felt shared religious ties with the Muslim world and have consequently been much more forthcoming in their attitudes and policies. Indeed, Necmettin Erbakan, head of the Islamic-oriented Welfare Party, set forth the vision of his own party's policies toward the Arab world during the 1991 elections. He denounced other parties as simply being part of a "Western club" with a "discotheque mentality" and urged that Turkey not join the EC. He stated his beliefs in the importance of Turkey's future relations with the Islamic world, indicating that Turkey should instead be a member of an "Islamic common market and an Islamic defense pact."³

Turkish contractors in this period enjoyed extraordinary success in Arab countries, such as Libya and Saudi Arabia, where, at a time when the domestic market was weak, Turkey was able to obtain \$3.5 billion worth of contracts by January 1981. By the end of 1982, the value of Turkey's contracts with Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq totaled some \$10 billion.⁴ By the end of 1984, the value had risen to \$14.74 billion.⁵ By 1983, there were approximately 150,000 Turkish workers employed in the Middle East, who remitted some \$500 million in hard currency earnings in 1981. Turkey's exports to the Middle East doubled between 1979 and 1981.⁶

Unquestionably, the Middle East will remain for Turkey an important market deserving continued cultivation. Yet here, too, many Turkish businessmen have reservations about the character of longer-term trade with the Middle East because of the heavy political component of such trade. Because the politics of the region are so volatile and unpredictable, the economic relationships can also be. The price of oil, for example, has a direct impact on the amount of money in the Arab world available for external contracts, especially those in which Turkey enjoys a competitive edge. Concrete business planning is complex in such a volatile market. Indeed, not all of the Arab oil states have even paid their debts on a regular basis: Libya, in particular, reportedly owes Turkish contractors a considerable amount of money from many years back, and there have been periodic suggestions from Qadhafi that his satisfaction with Turkish policies could

³"Erbakan's vision: Islamic harmony and a cleansed society," *Briefing*, 14 October 1991, p. 6.

⁴Karaosmanoglu, *op. cit.*, p. 165-166.

⁵George E. Gruen: "Turkey's Relations with Israel and its Arab Neighbors," *Middle East Review*, Spring 1985, p. 42.

⁶See Karaosmanoglu, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

affect financial arrangements. Qadhafi was highly outspoken against Turkey during the Gulf War. Turkish businessmen are, of course, uncomfortable with these political linkages.

In much of the Middle East, then, trading patterns tend to reflect the trade policy of the countries involved rather than market forces, making market prediction nearly impossible when it may be so closely tied to the political whim of rulers who tomorrow may decide that they are unhappy with Turkey for one reason or another. Commercial arrangements often depend heavily on the role of the single leader as opposed to solidly institutionalized commercial relationships, especially in states like Iraq, Syria, and Libya. As long as political, rather than market, forces reign, there can be no reliable pattern of commerce with the Middle East on which businessmen can build. These factors complicate the normal kind of market research on which Turkish trade depends in Europe or the United States. Turkish businessmen point out, for example, that Turkey's firm stance on the side of the United States in the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein served to prejudice the Arab world against it (just as Qadhafi had charged), damaging the prospects for a longer-term commercial relationship with the Arab world.

These views represent a slightly simplistic formulation, of course. Radical states, such as Libya, hardly constitute a bellwether for general Arab attitudes, and a majority of Arab states did support Operation Desert Storm against Iraq, however reluctantly. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were highly grateful for Turkey's forthright stand against Iraq, its closing of the Iraqi pipeline, the provision of Incirlik air base to U.S. forces during the war, and the "second front" that Turkey opened against Baghdad. These two Gulf states have gone some way toward rewarding Turkey for its stance, as will be discussed below.

Indeed, it is these very factors that help fuel the internal debate—albeit lopsided—over the relative value of Turkish ties with the Islamic world as opposed to a Western orientation. While the vast majority of the country would seem to heartily support Turkey's Western orientation as reflecting both Turkey's aspirations and its interests, a minority of more Islamic-oriented groups argue that Turkey is losing opportunities in the Arab world for both political and economic influence as a result of its "slavish" ties with the United States. These groups argue that only when Turkey is perceived to be truly a Muslim country with a genuinely independent foreign policy will it enjoy the respect of the Muslim world and will be in a position to better profit economically from those relations. Similar views are often reflected in the

Arab press as well, which advises Turkey to think more carefully about preserving its ties with the Arab world rather than chasing after an elusive relationship with the EC.⁷

While those in Turkey who espouse the Middle East option would seem to be a relatively small group, the message is shared in part by some elements of the left, who themselves have long been uncomfortable with what they perceive as Turkey's total commitment—or even subordination—to American policies. These leftists would rather see Turkey pursue a greater “anti-imperialist” or Third World orientation. However much “anti-imperialist” most leftists may be, however, in favoring a more international orientation for Turkey, they hold no special brief for the Muslim world per se and, indeed, deeply distrust any Islamic orientation.

Ozal's own vision for a Turkish role in the Middle East has adroitly bridged both the “Islamist-leftist” view and the Europeanist view. Ozal is totally committed to a Western orientation, but in no way believes that this position precludes a major Turkish role in the Middle East, especially in the economic field. Ozal has spoken of the need for some kind of Middle East regional fund, a sort of Marshall Plan, that would combine Arab oil money and Western funds for the development of the region as a whole.⁸ The Turkish role in this kind of economic cooperation would lie in the provision of water to the region—a “water peace pipeline.” Ozal sees the free exchange of goods, capital, services, and labor as essential to the new Middle East economic order. Stress on Turkey's economic involvement would be less provocative to regional neighbors than Turkey's military role, which remains, of course, one of the most powerful in the region.

TURKISH RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

Turkey's view of the Middle East has been significantly shaped by the close ties that so many Arab states had with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The continuing Arab-Israeli struggle also tended to radicalize Syria's relations with regional states. Now, the demise of

⁷See for example the article by Raghib al-Sulh in the pan-Arab daily *al-Hayat*, 18 October 1991, arguing that Turkey should pursue neither a pro-Western nor a pan-Turkic policy, but a “third, Middle Eastern option.” Typically, Libya's Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi stated during the Gulf War that he had “lost hope in Turkey” as a result of Turkey's support for the United States against Iraq that had ruined its relations with the Arab world; he said that Turkey must stop permitting the United States to use Incirlik airbase if “a Third World War is to be avoided.” “Qaddafi Threatens: ‘Opening of Second Front by Turkey Will be World War III,’” *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

⁸See *Briefing*, 11 February 1991, pp. 3–4.

communism and the emergence of new thinking in Soviet foreign policy have already significantly influenced Syria, the character of Arab politics, and even the Arab-Israeli peace process—which will inevitably affect Turkey's relationship with the Arab states in region. More recently, the chances for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli-Palestinian settlement have probably never been better, with the end of East-West tensions, the convening of Arab-Israeli peace talks in Madrid, and the election of a Labor government in Israel. Resolution of that conflict would have a major affect on the Syrian role in the region, including its relationship with Turkey; there is no longer an "enemy" or radical camp for Syria to belong to, hence less grounds for Syrian militancy or hostility toward Turkey as a symbol of the West. Border issues, water-sharing problems, and terrorism will remain as genuine bilateral issues, however.

Syrian-Turkish relations have long been corroded by a dispute over Turkey's Hatay (Iskenderun) province. This province was awarded to Turkey by Franco-Turkish agreement and a plebiscite in 1939 but is still claimed by Syria as its rightful territory. Syria has long enjoyed the support of other Arab states on the issue; Turks carrying passports listing Hatay as their birthplace have routinely been denied visas to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage. With the diminution of the general ideological struggle in the region, however, it is possible this territorial issue may gradually lose its salience in Syrian-Turkish relations over time. Significantly, it does not seem to have come up as a topic at all during March 1991 bilateral meetings between the Syrian and Turkish Foreign Ministers in Ankara.⁹

Water issues present both potential conflict and opportunity. Turkey's construction of the Ataturk dam on the Euphrates gives it the powerful ability to cut off water Syria—and eventually Iraq—badly needs downstream. Turkey has already demonstrated none too subtly to Syria and Iraq that it has the ability to manipulate water flow to achieve political ends. Improved Turkish-Syrian relations could inaugurate far more forthcoming water policies on Ankara's part toward the region. Indeed, Ozal, in one of his typically creative departures, has suggested that Turkey eventually construct two "water peace pipe-lines" that could carry Anatolian water—of which Turkey has an abundance—one going to Syria, Jordan, and Israel and the other through Iraq to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. In talks with Syria, Turkey recently suggested that it would be willing to discuss a

⁹"Shara visit marks new phase in Turkish-Syrian relations," *Briefing*, 25 March 1991, p. 9-10.

much broader range of joint water projects between Syria and Turkey in both drinking water and electricity generation.¹⁰

Apart from the impact of these potential pipelines on Turkey's bilateral relations with all of these states, the pipeline also directly affects bilateral relations among those same states themselves: They cannot share in the water if there is no general agreement on water usage among all of them, including Israel. Turkey's "political" use of this water thus serves as another stimulus to the Arab-Israeli reconciliation process. Turkey's possession of this critical commodity—perhaps one day to become more important than oil itself—could give it major leverage over the other states in the region, assuming the project is really feasible. Unlike the maze of oil pipelines that now criss-cross the region, giving states multiple channels by which to market their oil, a major water supply for these states can really come from only one northern source: Turkey. Ultimate reliance on the benefits of this water source for these states also creates a potentially powerful dependence on Turkey—which these states may not want.

Terrorist concerns have played a major role in creating Turkish hostility toward the Arab world, especially Syria. As part of its general anti-Western orientation, and specific grievances with Turkey in particular, Syria has for several decades supported political movements hostile to Ankara, including three of Turkey's most dangerous opponents: the Armenian Marxist terrorist organization ASALA, radical Kurdish groups, and Turkish radicals.¹¹ All have had operational and training bases in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa valley in Lebanon, from which they have conducted anti-Turkish operations. ASALA long conducted a violent assassination campaign against Turkish diplomats around the world. The radical PKK has maintained bases in the Bekaa as well, as have other violent Turkish Marxist groups affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party, such as the Turkish Liberation Army. In keeping with the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO's) general policies in the 1970s of maintaining cooperative relations with a variety of Third World liberation groups to help ensure its own viability and legitimacy—especially at a time when anti-Western terror figured more prominently in the PLO's thinking—nearly all of these organizations have also been at least in liaison in some way with the PLO, or the PLO's most radical branches, despite

¹⁰*Briefing*, op. cit., 25 March 1991. Turkish thinking on the water pipeline may be overly optimistic, both in terms of the amount of water Turkey has for export and of the costs of shipping the water south.

¹¹Neil C. Livingstone and David Halevy, *Inside the PLO*, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1990, p. 82.

PLO disavowal of support for them. Turkey's relations with the PLO have been significantly strained as a result, despite Turkey's diplomatic recognition of the PLO and its long-term commitment to the foundation of a Palestinian state. And Israel has naturally not shrunk from providing its own information to Turkey on this score.¹²

Syria has periodically used its support for the PKK in particular as a regular instrument of pressure against Turkey, the prominence of its support waxing and waning with the political environment. Following the end of the Gulf War in 1991, Syria reportedly set certain limitations once again on the activities of the PKK operating out of Syrian-controlled territory, including cross-border operations into Turkey from Syria.¹³ By the spring of 1992, the Syrians had asked the PKK to vacate the Bekaa in a gesture to Turkish and U.S. pressure. Syria is likely to continue to gauge the value of maintaining this instrument of pressure against Turkey—at least in a dormant phase—as opposed to the broader costs to its image, interests, and relations with the United States and Turkey. It can always resuscitate support to the PKK if its interests so dictate in the future.

Turkey's relations with Syria will continue to depend to a considerable extent on the broader evolution of the Kurdish problem. The Kurdish issue between Syria and Turkey is basically a symptom, rather than the cause, of bad relations. The Kurds represent an instrument and not a goal for Damascus. The Kurdish population of Syria itself is vastly smaller than that of Turkey, Iran, or Iraq, and Kurdish separatism in Syria has never been a potential problem. If the tensions between Turkey and Syria—which are primarily ideological, representing conflict between a pro-Western state and a pro-Soviet state—can be resolved, then the Kurdish issue will lose salience for Syria as one of its weapons of choice against Turkey. Water, too, is more an instrument of pressure between Ankara and Damascus than the source of conflict in itself.

The key question for the future relationship lies in the degree to which Syria may continue to see Turkey as representing a basically hostile, anti-Syrian, Western presence in the region. Resolution of this confrontation is largely up to Syria itself, in distancing itself from its earlier Cold-War driven policies. If the Arab-Israeli issue can be resolved, Syria may feel less reason to fear Western influences in the region. We cannot now, of course, know what shape future alliances and alignments may take in the region. Syria might easily find itself

¹²Gruen, op. cit. p. 34.

¹³İsmet G. İmset, "Syria suspends support to PKK," *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

in search of a permanent counterweight to Iraq, much as it has been long aligned with Iran against Baghdad. One report during the Gulf War stated that Damascus had secretly asked Turkey to host its air force in the event that Saddam sought to attack it during hostilities.¹⁴ Ankara could represent another counterweight to Baghdad, or even to Cairo if an Egyptian-Syrian rivalry should emerge in the future. In trade issues as well, Turkey could be important to Syria as a key transit point to European markets. Syria too could be a valuable market to Turkey, especially as Syria's oil resources continue to develop. In short, there is no reason to believe that Ankara and Damascus must always keep their daggers drawn, but Syria must continue to move in the direction of moderation if we are to see a re-orientation of this relationship.

A hostile, radical Syria will unquestionably continue to clash with Turkey over Hatay, the Kurds, water, and Turkey's pro-Western orientation and strategic assistance to the United States. Under such circumstances, Syria would opt to remain in its classic role of radical leader in the Arab world and would refuse to reach any kind of reconciliation with Israel. The continuing existence of radical forces in the Arab world would then suggest that Turkey will be facing hostility not only from Syria but also from Iran and/or Iraq, depending on the kinds of new alignments that might emerge. Turkey will then continue to place particular emphasis on security relations with the West, particularly with the United States, to maintain its military capabilities against such a radical challenge from the Arab world.

A radical, anti-Turkish Syria is unlikely to challenge Turkey in any direct military sense; military confrontation has never been its chosen instrument in the past. Deniable subversion, and support for Turkey's internal enemies, such as radical leftists or separatist Kurds, would be the mainstay of Syrian instruments against Turkey. If such a negative course of action does in fact materialize, armed conflict between Turkey and Syria could not be ruled out. Syria would be highly vulnerable, given its need to focus its forces primarily on the Israeli front. Such a scenario also presupposes very tense Syrian-Israeli relations, in which Israel had refused to negotiate a land-for-peace agreement on the Golan and Syria had reverted to its classical anti-Israeli radicalism. Turkey might also shrink less from undertaking punitive military action against Syria now that the Cold War is over, Russia no longer supports Syrian ambitions, and Syria's anti-Israeli posture would be largely of its own volition. A Turkey deter-

¹⁴"U.S. Asks Ankara to Accept Autonomous Kurdistan," *Turkish Times*, 1 February 1991.

mined to play a greater role in the region would also be less tolerant of egregious anti-Turkish subversive activities supported by Syria.

TURKEY BETWEEN THE ARABS AND ISRAEL

Turkey has always been intensely ambivalent about Israel. Turkey broke ranks with the Muslim world in recognizing Israel in 1949, an action it justified in pragmatic terms of recognizing reality. Trade between the two states was extensive during the 1950s.¹⁵ Turkey has also shared a de facto security interest with Israel stemming from mutual distrust of radical forces in the Middle East. In addition, Turkey has been well aware of Israel's strong support in the United States, particularly in Congress, where Turkey too has sought support. Israel itself has always been somewhat sympathetic toward Turkey, starting with the fact of the highly tolerant attitude of the Ottoman Empire toward its Jewish subjects over the centuries. Turkey has always been one of the few Muslim countries Israelis could visit—busloads of Israeli tourists can be found in Turkey at any time; indeed, good ties with Turkey have been psychologically significant to Israel, in that they strengthen Israel's hope and belief that its problems are more with the Arab world than with the Muslim world in general.

Turkey established an early and fairly close working relationship with Israel, beginning after the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958, that even included extensive intelligence exchanges on issues of terrorism and Arab subversive movements. Exchange of intelligence information on Lebanon has likewise always been in Turkey's interests because of the use of the Bekaa valley by anti-Turkish radical groups; the collapse of central authority in Lebanon since the late 1970s was a source of anxiety to Ankara almost as much as to Jerusalem.¹⁶

On the other hand, Turkey has always understood that there are significant costs related to the maintenance of formal ties with Israel. Turkey has always wanted the support of the Third World, and especially the Muslim World, for its position on Cyprus. And it has long supported the Palestinian quest for an independent state.¹⁷ In addition, Turkey has sought to share in the bounty of the Arab oil states, especially during the boom of the mid-1970s. Saudi Arabia was not beneath attempting to weaken Turkey's ties with Israel in re-

¹⁵Gruen, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁶Gruen, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁷Turgut Ozal, "An Unavoidable War," *The Washington Post*, 21 January 1991.

turn for a \$250 million loan to Turkey; in the event, Turkey did downgrade its relations with Jerusalem, at least in part due to its interest in economic relations with the Saudis.¹⁸ Turkey's relations with the rest of the Muslim and Arab world have thus continued to expand, partly at the expense of its ties with Jerusalem.

Turkey will always be mindful of its position as a Muslim state; even if Ankara's Foreign Ministry gives scant recognition or importance to any "Muslim solidarity," Islamic sentiment among the general public will always play some role in Turkey's future foreign policy—to be balanced off against other interests. Turkey's relations with Israel are nonetheless likely to significantly improve in the longer run if major progress can be made on the Arab-Israeli peace issue. A significant general deterioration in Arab-Israeli ties, particularly if it emerges from strongly intransigent policies from Jerusalem that reject a land-for-peace trade-off, will cause Turkey to distance itself from Israel. As noted above, Turkey's potential use of a water peace pipeline to the Arab world and Israel could significantly affect Turkey's future role in the area and could lessen the complicating factors of closer ties with an Israel that is reaching accommodation with the Arabs. Israel's technology could be a major attraction to Turkey in its future industrial and technological development.

TURKEY AND IRAQ

The Iran-Iraq War brought war to Turkey's doorstep for the first time since World War II. That seven-year conflict in the Gulf, combined with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, immensely raised the levels of tension in the states just south and east of Turkey, forcing Ankara to devote far greater attention to "Eastern policies" than ever before. In keeping with Turkey's usual pattern of foreign policy toward the Third World area, it maintained a scrupulous neutrality during the conflict.

A policy of neutrality not only kept Turkey out of the conflict, but served Turkey's economic interests well. The Iran-Iraq war in fact further transformed Turkey's pattern of foreign trade, accounting for a nearly five-fold growth in trade with the Middle East from 1982 to 1987, mostly with Iran and Iraq. Racked by war, both Iran and Iraq needed Turkey as an overland economic lifeline and transportation link to the West and as a source of products in its own right.

¹⁸Gruen, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

But the Iran-Iraq War also raised two other troubling ethnic and territorial questions about Kurdistan and the oil-rich region of Mosul. The Iraqi Kurds, as always, took advantage of the conflict to establish a greater degree of autonomy from the highly repressive regime in Baghdad; in the course of the war, they were able to establish a much greater degree of freedom of action in traditional Kurdish areas and resuscitated their ongoing guerrilla war with Iraqi forces. The Iranians supported the Iraqi Kurdish guerrilla movement as a means of weakening Baghdad and creating diversions against the Iraqi army. The Iraqi Kurds, with Iranian support, sought to cut Iraq's oil pipeline that passes through Turkey to the Mediterranean.

Ankara, which did not wish to lose the revenues of the pipeline and was hostile to any expression of Kurdish insurgency anywhere in the region, responded with a tough line toward the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. With Iraq's agreement, Turkish forces made several air raids across the border, in 1986 and 1987, into the camps of Kurdish guerrilla insurgents operating against Turkey¹⁹—thereby establishing a new pattern of involvement in northern Iraqi Kurdish affairs that has since continued and increased. For the first time in decades, the Turkish press—in part unquestionably inspired by the government—began to make references to Turkey's old claims to the Mosul region of Iraq, relinquished in 1926 under pressure from the British. The press repeatedly suggested Turkey might have to enter Iraq and even take over the oil regions to protect the pipeline from Kurdish insurgents as long as the Iraqi government was unable to protect it. Turkey reportedly notified Iran and the United States officially in 1986, when Iraq was faring badly in the war, that it would demand the return of Mosul and Kirkuk in the event of the collapse of Iraq.²⁰ The warning to Iran in this regard was explicit.

Turkish claims—officially renounced in 1926—to the territory of Mosul were based not only on earlier Ottoman control over the region but also on the important ethnic presence of between 300,000 and 500,000 "Turks," or Turkmen, who live in the region—constituting perhaps 2 to 3 percent of the overall Iraqi population.²¹

¹⁹See Ali Fuat Borovali, "Kurdish Insurgencies, the Gulf War, and Turkey's Changing Role," *Conflict Quarterly*, Fall 1987, pp. 39–40.

²⁰Richard C. Hottelet, "Mideast Wild Card: Kurds in Iraq, Turkey," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 October 1990.

²¹This percentage is from Richard Nyrop, *Iraq: A Country Study*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1979. A bulletin from "The Iraqi National Turkman Party: Dunya Kamuoyuna Duyuru," (Bulletin to World Public Opinion) (undated) from the Turkmen themselves in 1990 speaks of the Turkmen population as "reaching two

These Turkmen feel themselves harshly oppressed by Baghdad and the Kurds, but consider themselves abandoned, even by Turkey. Not without significance, the oil resources of this Kirkuk region produced 1.5 million barrels per day in 1990, a very important factor to be considered in any future Kurdish-Iraqi negotiations over the status of Kurdistan.²²

The Gulf War against Iraq, however, and the defeat of Saddam Hussein, created vastly greater tensions between Ankara and Baghdad. Unlike its posture of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war, this time Ankara was allied with the United States directly against Iraq in the war; any Iraqi threat of military action against Turkey could have sparked a potential Turkish incursion into the Mosul region. Ankara also explicitly warned both Syria and Iran that, in the event of the collapse of Baghdad and general chaos in Iraq, Turkey would not sit by and allow either of those countries to entertain notions of territorial aggrandizement at Iraq's expense.²³

Geopolitical relationships between Turkey and Iran will remain dominated by numerous contentious issues:

- The accelerating evolution of the Kurdish problem
- Turkish concern for the welfare of the Turkish/Turkmen population in northern Iraq
- Turkish concern for Iraqi expansionism and search for hegemony in the region
- The Iraqi quest for weapons of mass destruction
- Iraq as a potential geopolitical counterweight to either Iran or Syria should Turkish relations with those states ever deteriorate; conversely, those two states are counterweights to Iraq in the event of hostile Turkish-Iraqi relations
- Potential friction over Turkish control of the sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, which flow into Iraq
- Turkish control of the Iraqi oil pipeline to the Mediterranean.

The latter two issues do not inherently represent points of friction in themselves, but could become instruments of hostile action in the

million people." This figure is vastly inflated, but reliable figures are not available; Turkey inflates them, the Iraqis and Kurds deflate them.

²²*Foreign Reports Bulletin*, newsletter, Washington, D.C., 14 March 1991.

²³"President Turgut Ozal Warns Syria and Iran to Stay out of Iraq," *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

event of deterioration of bilateral relations on other grounds—as during and after the Gulf War.

The Kurdish issue is almost certainly destined to create intense friction between Turkey and Iraq. In principle, both states share a common interest in limiting the emergence of any kind of Kurdish autonomy or independence; that shared interest has been revealed periodically in the past few decades. Even during the Iran-Iraq War, Baghdad gave Ankara the green light to help repress Kurdish guerrilla activities in northern Iraq when the Iraqi army was otherwise engaged on the Iranian front. But Ankara and Baghdad have each always viewed their Kurdish problem differently. While the Kurds in Iraq have enjoyed some minor degree of cultural autonomy as an ethnic minority, they have been harshly repressed, subject to massive military onslaught—albeit partially in reaction to their efforts to gain greater autonomy and their periodic service to Iran—and have had no effective voice as a community in Iraqi political life. Until recently in Turkey, Kurds have never even existed officially, thus could not be a “minority” or suffer from minority status as long as they did not insist on being so.

As Ozal intimated in his remarkable willingness to open up the Kurdish issue in Turkey and to actually meet with Iraqi Kurdish opposition leaders, some elements in Turkey may be willing to reconsider the future of the Kurdish movement. If Turkey is willing to consider the prospect that, at some time down the road, a Kurdish independence movement will inevitably emerge, then Turkey will be facing a whole new political equation. Ankara would be taking the gamble of making a bid for a dominant voice and influence over a future Kurdish state. If a unified Kurdish state were ever to emerge in the future, Turkish Kurds will have the overwhelming advantage not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of culture and development. A high proportion of Turkish Kurds do not even live in the underdeveloped southeastern provinces of Turkey, but are scattered around and participating in the urban life of Western Turkey. These Kurds will always have intimate linguistic, cultural, and societal ties with Turkey that will have a decisive influence on the nature of any independent Kurdish state. In short, two questions could be posed to Turkey: To what extent do you wish to anticipate the future movement of Kurdish nationalism and seek to place your mark on it through positive interaction with it? Or do you prefer to act repressively, perhaps in conjunction with Iraq or Iran, in a desperate attempt to stop the process?

No one can say whether the emergence of an independent Kurdistan is in any sense inevitable. Turkish policies toward the Kurdish population will have a major, but perhaps not decisive, effect on the process. The nature of interrelationships among Kurds from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey will all have influence on the process as well. Sharp differences exist among them in traditions, clans and tribes, local history, outlook, lifestyle, and even dialect. As one Turk pointed out, if Turkey were to grant the Kurds the right to broadcast in Kurdish from Eastern Turkey, the Kurds would rapidly disagree as to which of two quite different dialects—Zaza or Kirmanji, just within Turkey itself—would be the language of communication. But the chances are good that differing Turkish and Iraqi policies on the issue will lead to friction between the two states. Those frictions will be more intense if Baghdad continues to operate as a highly repressive dictatorship, as compared to the functioning democracy in Turkey. In crudest terms, Turkey historically gains when Baghdad is able to control its own Kurds; any development in Iraq that ends up giving the Kurds greater freedom of action only allows the Kurds to broaden their own political quest for autonomy everywhere. That is the situation in Iraq today, only perhaps this time it has moved decisively into a new stage. It would appear far harder today for Turkey ever to cooperate with Baghdad against the Kurds.

Iran, too, is a player in the Kurdish politics of the region. An alternative dynamic is at work here. As long as Iran and Iraq remain hostile, Iran will almost inevitably seek to destabilize Iraq through inciting the Iraqi Kurds. Put bluntly, what is in Tehran's interests vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds is contrary to Turkish interests. Should Turkey and Iran come to loggerheads on other issues in the future, Iran could also seek to support insurgencies among the Turkish Kurds as well. Here is where Turkey will need to decide the degree to which it will "democratize" the Kurdish issue inside Turkey and let events follow their "natural" course.

Increased airing and debate in Turkey of all these issues can, in the end, only help to soften their impact. Initially, of course, it will be heady for Turkish Kurds to discuss the concept of separatism, and increased friction will inevitably emerge from open discussion of this long-repressed and volatile issue. In the end, however, as Kurds look at the sober realities, separatism may lose some of its attraction, and the issue will come to be a major object of debate and disagreement among Kurds themselves.

Iraqi quest for power in the region brings it inevitably into conflict with Turkey, especially now that Iraq views regional power in terms

of possession of weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological, and nuclear. The presence of such weapons in Iraq is fundamentally intolerable to Turkey. If Iraq is successfully able to move toward acquisition of such weapons, without challenge from the international community, Turkey, too, will certainly be driven to seek comparable weapons, if only on a defensive basis. Iran too has long viewed the establishment of its own nuclear program as a necessity in facing Iraq. The prospect thus remains that the Iran-Iraq-Turkey triangle may take on a much more ominous character in the decades ahead, given the conflicting ambitions of three significant powers that share radically different strategic goals.

Perhaps the major question for future Turkish politics lies in the degree to which Turkey will seek to actively involve itself at all in Arab politics. As we noted earlier, Turks have traditionally held an intrinsic distaste for the Arab world and have generally seen it as lying, in part, under the influence of the enemy camp—the Soviet Union. As Arab politics now move toward an era free of the Cold War's global polarization of forces, Arab politics will seem less directly ideologically hostile to Turkey. Turkish involvement in Arab politics may then come to be seen as more "normal," particularly if pan-Arab ideologies come to play a lesser role.

Will Turkey, for example, interest itself in the future security policies in the Persian Gulf? The larger Arab states basically are cool toward the idea of any non-Arab states—even Iran—having any say in Gulf security policy. A good argument can be made, however, that it would be quite desirable for Gulf security to be provided by the regional states themselves, instead of requiring the regular intervention of Western forces. But precisely what states are "regional"? This definition would wisely include more than just the Arab states: Iran, at a minimum, and probably Turkey and Pakistan as well. When Arabs alone determine the politics of the Gulf, there has historically been a tendency for the more radical pan-Arab governments to end up defining just what constitutes "Arab legitimacy" of governments in the region. The purpose of including three non-Arab states in a regional security grouping would be to avoid the pitfall of permitting those pan-Arab sentiments from dominating the security discussion in the region. A mixture of Arab and non-Arab states would keep the region's politics from being defined in a specifically Arab vocabulary.

Turkey would be reluctant to interject itself into such a role, unless its participation were sought by others or were specifically urged by the United States, which itself would be a key participant. Turkey's former Ambassador to NATO stated that Turkey must be very careful

in taking part in any such pact and that most Arab countries "do not have a warm feeling" toward Turkey and could have misgivings about its participation.²⁴ Turkish Islamic fundamentalists, too, are distinctly unhappy with any kind of Turkish "security role" in the region linked with the West and, indeed, opposed Ozal's support of the anti-Iraqi coalition in the Gulf War.²⁵ On the other hand, Turkey reportedly had indirectly displayed some disappointment that, despite its significant role in the Gulf War, it was not included in the post-war Damascus meeting where the six Arab Gulf states, Syria, and Egypt set forth new future peacekeeping forces in the region in the "Damascus Declaration."²⁶

Ozal nonetheless foresaw some role for Turkey in the Gulf when he announced in March 1991 that "Turkey will have a definite role in any security system for the Middle East, but the United States should also be present, or else this force will not be able to keep the peace."²⁷ Turkish policy has traditionally and instinctively sought to avoid any perception of playing the role of U.S. cat's-paw in the region. But here again, it was Ozal who specifically broke significant new policy ground in openly articulating the view that Turkish interests were intimately linked with American interests in the recent Gulf War. Ozal's position was not based simply on support of any American regional policy but also on the participation of broader Western and UN involvement as a whole; Ozal wished to have Turkey perceived as an independent and indispensable actor in its own right. Ozal significantly commented after the Gulf War that this was the "first time in 200 years that Turkey had managed to be on the winning side of a war" and therefore hoped to reap some benefits from it.²⁸

For these gains too, then, Turkey might have some interest in a greater security role in the Gulf. As noted above, a major Turkish water "peace pipeline" would automatically invest it with a greater say in regional affairs. Gulf politics are likely to grow more rather than less complex in the future as well: A predictable degree of instability in the Gulf will emerge over the next decade as existing monarchies move toward their inevitable end. The fall of the old monarchies will not only throw the orientation of the new regimes up

²⁴"Ankara Cautious on Defense Pact," *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

²⁵Clyde Haberman, "Turkish Fundamentalists Call for Withdrawal from Coalition," *The New York Times*, 30 January 1991.

²⁶*Briefing*, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁷William D. Montalbano, "Ozal Seeks to Translate Role as Gulf War Ally Into Power for Turkey," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1991.

²⁸"Ozal Upbeat on Gulf Policy and Future," *Turkish Times*, 1 April 1991.

for grabs, but might in many cases even raise questions about the longer-range viability and legitimacy of some of the earlier sheikhdoms as independent states. Larger regional states may well compete for new influence. Under these circumstances, a strong regional grouping—including Turkey—concerned with regional security would appear desirable.

4. TURKEY AND IRAN

TURKEY AND IRAN

In the sixteenth century, the Shi'ite religion, newly established in Iran, helped to poise Iran for a massive ideological struggle against the Ottoman Empire, whose Sultan and Caliph came to be the leader of the Sunni Muslim world. Hostile relations of one degree or another continued down to the end of World War I. At that point, two quite remarkable new nationalist leaders came to power in each country: Reza Shah in Iran and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey. For the first time, each nation's leader saw his own national interests as lying in the internal development of his own country, forswearing foreign adventures. Both men sought to establish true national sovereignty free of European imperialist pressures, enabling them to exercise genuine national power for the first time in centuries. Both states promptly signed a series of agreements with each other and shared a concern for the power of the new Bolshevik empire to the north. Both states joined in various Northern Tier security arrangements, such as the Baghdad Pact and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) against the Soviet Union. Until the Islamic Revolution in Iran, bilateral relations between the two states were excellent, despite little admiration of Turk or Persian for each other.

But the Iranian Revolution had a major impact on Turkey's basically smooth relations with Iran over the past half century, creating strains resulting from Iran's efforts to "export the Islamic Revolution." Turkey was instinctively antipathetic both to the radicalism and the fundamentalist Islamic character of the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. Tehran declared Turkey's founding father Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to be an enemy of Islam and flirted with trying to enlist the sympathies of Turkey's own quasi-Shi'ite Alevi population. The Iranian regime also blatantly lent both moral and financial support to Turkey's own fundamentalist Sunni groups, seeking to bolster their anti-Western tendencies. As noted above, Tehran also played in Kurdish politics in Iraq, thereby threatening the Iraqi pipeline into Turkey. Ankara, on the other hand, felt it was important to try to moderate Iranian policies and to treat Tehran's revolutionary stance with as much tolerance as possible, particularly since the Soviet Union in the early 1980s sought opportunities for significant inroads into Iran. Yet, more pragmatic tendencies have gradually come to the fore, as Tehran has been forced to recognize the importance of good

relations with Ankara, particularly in the course of the Iran-Iraq war. Indeed, in 1988, Iran joined Turkey and Pakistan in yet a new incarnation of the old Northern Tier groupings, this time the Economic Cooperation Organization.¹

Nonetheless, the turmoil of the Gulf war in 1991 caused Iran, too, to explicitly signal to Turkey its concerns that Turkey might take advantage of any Iraqi collapse to seize the oil zones of northern Iraq.² Iranian concerns were also heightened by the UN's creation of enclaves at the end of the war along the northern Iraqi border with Turkey for the protection of Kurdish refugees. Iran feared that this action might presage Turkish designs against Iraqi Kurdish territory or lead to the occupation of parts of northern Iraq by the United States or other Western powers.

In short, while neither Iran nor Turkey fears any direct aggression from the other, both have become suspicious of each other's intentions toward Iraq since the Gulf war. Neither is willing to allow the other to take unilateral advantage of weakness or turmoil in Iraq. These issues will not go away; they will in fact be exacerbated as Iraq struggles to put together some new political order with greater democratic participation. Any change in the Iraqi political system is likely to involve considerable instability as Shi'ites seek the dominant political position that their demographic plurality should accord them. Turkey and Iran are likely both to seek to influence those developments and to perceive each other as rivals for influence in Iraqi affairs.

But, after long decades of harmony, future Turkish-Iranian relations now look very bleak indeed. This strategic sea-change has been unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resultant shifts in geopolitical relationships all through the region. Turkey faces sharp conflict and even potential hostilities with Iran because of the following issues:

- The Kurdish problem (discussed at length above)
- Potential conflict over efforts by Iran to export concepts of "political Islam" in the region—if in fact the current regime in Tehran should persist in pursuing them
- Competition for influence in Central Asia

¹Mushahid Hussain, "Iran Forges New Links," *Middle East International*, 17 February 1989, p. 17.

²See Sheherezade Daneshkhu, "Iran: New Force of Stability?" in *The Middle East*, March 1991, p. 8; see also *The Tehran Times*, 20 January 1991, where an editorial explicitly warned of Turkey's long-standing ambitions to take control of northern Iraq.

- Most seriously of all, the evolution of nationalism in Azerbaijan, drawing both Turkey and Iran into competition and threatening the very territorial integrity of Iran.

The last two issues are discussed below in "Turkey and Central Asia" and in Section 5, "Turkey and the Caucasus: the Azerbaijan Problem."

TURKEY AND CENTRAL ASIA

The Central Asian republics of the USSR, while less advanced than many other republics in elaboration of a new national identity, have joined the other republics in declaring their status as independent republics—perhaps faster than they themselves would have sought. Armed for the first time with the freedom to express their own ethnic and national interests, they are in the process of returning to a clearer sense of their own Turkic character. Indeed, in the last century, the entire region was referred to as "Turkestan" and recognized as a cultural unit. In Central Asia (or Turkestan) today, except for the republic of Tajikistan, which is Persian-speaking, all the Central Asian republics are Turkic in language and culture. Their languages are mutually comprehensible (despite sometimes considerable dialectic differences); they even find the Turkish of Turkey roughly comprehensible. For these reasons, Turkey has long been the cultural magnet for traditional Turkestan, even in the 19th century.

Today, the Turkic republics of Central Asia are increasingly interested in renewed contact with Turkey, seeking investment and closer cultural ties. The response of the Turkish government was initially somewhat cautious, especially at the outset, when the status of the "new republics" was far from clear, and Turkey sought to avoid any perception of seeking to undermine the existing USSR. The Atatürkist legacy had clearly warned against any kind of pan-Turkist adventures, such as those that had characterized the policies of the last days of the Ottoman Empire when Enver Pasha had attempted to stir up the Turks of the newly founded Soviet state to create a breakaway, independent pan-Turkist state. Atatürk recognized that pan-Turkist policies could only provoke the formidable power of the Soviet state against Turkey and that the new Turkish republic should focus its energies on establishing a smaller, nationalist, ethnically homogeneous state within realistic borders.

Turkish foreign policy changed rapidly after the formal break-up of the USSR in December 1991. This change was stimulated by Turkish public opinion and the press, which was fascinated with Turkey's long-lost "brothers" in the Soviet Union; by international commentary

speculating on the future relationship between Turkey and these republics;³ by the growing interest in ties with Turkey, expressed by Central Asians themselves seeking outside "patrons"; and by the growing interest of Turkish politicians who proved bolder than the traditionally minded Turkish Foreign Ministry and a great portion of the Turkish establishment, which adhered fairly closely to traditional, isolationist Atatürkist policies. There is new pride in Turkey in the fact that many geopoliticians discuss the emergence of new Turkic power and have dubbed the next century the "century of the Turks," a phrase often repeated in the Turkish press. As "Turkic power" grows in the world—from the Balkans to Western China's Xinjiang province—it will likely exert ever greater impact on nationalism in Turkey itself, spark a more activist Turkish foreign policy, and perhaps begin a new quest for influence. As Turkish State Minister Kamran Inan stated, "The international environment has changed. The bloc system is ended. Turkey has to accept, against her will, that she is a regional power."⁴ By the fall of 1991 the Turkish Foreign Ministry had put together a special team to visit Central Asia and to make recommendations on the formulation of new policies toward the newly emerging Turkic Central Asian states.⁵ Subsequently, the Foreign Ministry revamped its organizational lines to include a new section on Central Asian affairs. (The U.S. State Department, on the other hand, still has not resolved whether the Muslim states of the old USSR should still be part of Office of European Affairs.)

Typically, it was Ozal himself who was at the forefront of encouraging new relations with Central Asia. He pointedly included Alma Ata on his itinerary during a trip to the Soviet Union in March 1991. In that same month, the Kazakh Minister of Health visited Ankara and signed an agreement for cooperation with Turkey in the fields of health and medicine, in general, and in the production of medicine and medical equipment, in particular. Turkey had already signed

³Among others, see the author's early article in *Foreign Policy* in Spring 1990, "The Emergence of Central Asia," on potential regional impact of change in Central Asia.

⁴William D. Montalbano, "Ozal Seeks to Translate Role as Gulf War Ally Into Power for Turkey," *The Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1991.

⁵It is interesting to note that in no Turkic language is there a separate word distinguishing a Turk in Turkey from a Turk in Central Asia. While English distinguishes between "Turkish" and "Turkic" and Russian (identically) between "Turetski" and "Tyurkski," it has only been in the middle of 1991 that some Turkish newspapers, especially those more on the left, have coined the new Turkish adjective "Turki" to distinguish the Turks of Central Asia from the adjective "Turk" which they now use to refer to the Turks of Turkey only. But this usage is artificial and far from common parlance today. "Turk" is still the word to describe all Turks from Yugoslavia to Xinjiang.

similar agreements with Azerbaijan and Georgia.⁶ By spring of 1992, the leaders of all six ex-Soviet Muslim states had paid state visits to Ankara. The new government under Suleyman Demirel lost no time in building on and expanding these relations, symbolized most dramatically by his week-long visit to Central Asia in May 1992 with a massive contingent of Turkish businessmen and political, cultural, and economic specialists—the greatest attention yet paid to these new republics by a foreign state. During his visit, in a direct and unprecedented challenge to Russian interests in the region, Demirel spoke of the possibility of establishing a Union of Turkish States, and suggested that Central Asia might be better off out of the ruble zone. Several months prior to that, Turkey had discussed the possibility of Turkey providing military training to Central Asia, had actively advocated the adoption of the Turkish (Latin) alphabet for all the Turkic languages of Central Asia, and had established plans for a satellite link to Central Asia that would carry Turkish broadcasts. Thus, by mid-1992, Turkey has made a bold bid for leadership and influence in the region in the political, financial, cultural, military, and economic areas.

Today, the nationalist and religious press in Turkey carry fairly detailed coverage of events in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The newspapers of the nationalist party of Alpaslan Turkes, *Yeni Düşünce* [New Thought], the nationalist *Türkiye* [Turkey], and the Islamic newspapers *Zaman* [Time] and *Milli Gazete* [The National Newspaper] have the heaviest coverage and an editorial policy strongly in support of the closest Turkish ties with these republics and general support for all Turks everywhere. The mainstream press also provides considerable coverage of these regions, often on a page dedicated to the *dis Türkler* [external Turks]. It is interesting to note that there is no de facto difference between the nationalist and the Islamic papers in terms of their support for the external Turks. Indeed, the extremist nationalist party of Turkes, long a distinct minority party, has claimed that the long-standing nationalist views of its founder have now been utterly vindicated by the new emergence of Central Asia, demonstrating the long-term wisdom of his pan-Turkist policy. Even the nonnationalist heavy-circulation papers recognize the popularity of articles about Turks outside the country, including those of the Balkans. The left-of-center papers, such as *Cumhuriyet*, devote less space to the issue.

⁶"Kazakhstan Minister Signs Accord," *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

Public interest in the external Turks is one thing. The willingness to devote new resources to new policies is something else. Public opinion in Turkey is not universally in favor of a nationalist Turkish foreign policy. The left has always opposed any support to the Turks of the Soviet Union, based on several rationales. First, the left sought good relations with the USSR and correctly understood that any policy with a hint of pan-Turkism would be grossly provocative to Moscow. The left also feared that any policies that smacked of resuscitating Turkic nationalism in the Soviet Union bore the stamp of the CIA, which sought to use Turkey as an instrument in the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. Third, even the "anti-imperialist" left has looked largely to Europe for its leftist political ideology; for Turkey to look back to the East with new nationalist policies could only be reactionary, especially when such policies also contain hints of some kind of "Islamic solidarity" that the left despises.

Today, left-of-center circles point out that Turkey has enough problems at home, making it a waste of resources to focus on Central Asia.⁷ They point out that these republics are poor and backward, offer little positive to Turkey, and can only be a drain on Turkish resources. How will the republics ever be able to pay for goods from Turkey? They point out that some 300,000 Bulgarian Turks fled to Turkey in the mid-1980s, which only created housing and employment difficulties for Turkey, and that, in the end, many of them returned to Bulgaria anyway. Many Turks feel they have far more in common with Europeans than they do with the Turks of Central Asia. Some even associate Central Asian Turks with the ruder, less Europeanized peasant strains of Anatolia, which now overflow the streets of Istanbul and Ankara. But for all of these feelings, Turkey cannot remain indifferent to developments in Central Asia, and its interest will likely grow over time. As one Turkish intellectual remarked: "It has been a great thrill for Turks to realize that they are no longer alone in the world."

Yet these objections are not groundless. The Turkish economic situation is somewhat stretched, with a large deficit and high inflation. Turkey's commitments to Central Asia now reach some \$52 million over the next several years. It is questionable whether Turkey will be able to meet these obligations without slighting other necessary sectors of the economy. Turkey may either find itself unable to meet its promises to the Central Asian states or may find itself overreaching the limits of its capabilities—this from a Demirel government that is

⁷These observations are based on (unattributed) interviews with a number of left-of-center Turkish intellectuals in September 1991.

business oriented and sharing power with a left-of-center party—hardly a strongly nationalist combination. It remains to be seen how a more nationalist government might commit itself to a pan-Turkist policy.

The longer-range future of Turkish politics cannot be predicted with any certainty, especially under the remarkable, new, and rapidly evolving conditions of the post-Cold War world. The emergence of the Turks of the world, from China to the Balkans—and perhaps the distantly related Mongols in China—may yet stir Turkish nationalist feelings, particularly if it is accompanied by a European rejection of Turkey for any kind of close association with the EC. The emergence of a new Turkish nationalist leadership could thus come to devote far greater attention to the external Turks than any policies since the founding of the republic. A rediscovery of the Ottoman Empire, and the recognition that not everything was bad about it, also serves to stimulate interest in former areas of empire (although Central Asia was never part of the Ottoman Empire, despite its cultural influence there).

THE VIEW FROM CENTRAL ASIA

These new relationships, of course, are not solely dependent upon Turkey. The Turks of Central Asia themselves will have considerable influence on how Turkey views the region as well. At this stage, the Central Asian Turks are still deep in a process of self-identification. Although the separate republics and boundaries of the five republics are utterly arbitrary, established by the Bolsheviks with an eye to divide and rule, they have been in existence for nearly 70 years. Their regional languages and dialects have to some degree now taken on the quality of official languages. Pressures of life in the Soviet empire had also created rivalries and even suspicions among themselves, often deliberately exacerbated by the policies of Moscow in the past to prevent the emergence of any kind of pan-Turkist thinking.

Despite a clearly emerging nationalist agenda in all of the Central Asian republics prior to the abortive August 1991 coup in Moscow—which brought the Soviet Union to an end by the end of that year—the republics were hardly ready for independence. In a sense, it came faster than they might even have desired, for it left them with massive new problems and decisions that would have much better been dealt with over a long transitional period. The former communist leaders of all the republics preferred to maintain the Union in at least some form in order to receive the benefits of a loose economic union. As the putative benefits of any kind of formal economic union grow

smaller with every passing day, and as Yeltsin's Russia increasingly reverts to a "Russia first" policy, these republics are left increasingly on their own and are required to determine how to build their own economic relationships for the future.

But should they each be separate, or unite among themselves into some form of the old Turkestan construct? As of now, thinking is in flux. Most of the republics are still under the control of the old communist party structures, now newly refurbished as "nationalist" leadership. These leaderships are decidedly nationalist in that they seek the best interests of their own republics, but they are sharply challenged by much more nationalist parties that are vying for power, usually with a broader reform agenda, and usually more anti-Moscow. If and when the nationalist parties eventually do come to power in the various republics, they will then have to determine the degree to which they seek a Turkestan-type of federation, if at all, and whether to commit themselves more fully to Turkey.

To date, the old nationalist-communist leaderships that remain in power in all Central Asian republics except Kirgizia are focused primarily—and correctly—on the very pragmatic questions of the future economic relations of the republics, both with the former republics of the Soviet Union as well as the outside world. Turkey is of course a key object of interest to the Central Asian Turks and is a model of much attraction, economically as well as culturally.⁸

But Turkey is not the only focus of their interests. They are also interested in ties with the economic boom states of East Asia, especially Korea and Japan. They have had economic ties in the past with India, which could also be of use, and seek new ties with Pakistan, formerly a state out of favor with the old USSR. A key goal is completion of new rail lines linking Beijing, Xinjiang province, and the Central Asian capitals and extending down into Iran with access to the Persian Gulf and overland to Istanbul and Europe.⁹

The future orientation of the republics' foreign policies is still evolving. While they maintain strong cultural, emotional, and psychological links with Turkey, they also realize that they should not foreclose any of their options. They are aware of the limitations of Turkey's re-

⁸See James Critchlow, "Ties with Turkey: A Lifeline for the Central Asians?" *Report on the USSR* (Radio Free Liberty Bulletin), 8 February 1991, p. 19.

⁹These views are based on the author's research trips to Central Asia in the summer of 1991 and spring of 1992 to examine the new geopolitical orientation of the newly emerged republics. The results are contained in *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics*, by Graham E. Fuller, RAND R-4219-USDP, 1992.

sources. They also recognize that geopolitics, at a minimum, dictate the crucial importance of Iran as the sole land route to the Persian Gulf and to Turkey itself. Despite Washington's clearly articulated preferences for Turkey as the model for Central Asian development over Iran, no republic can afford to dispense with ties with Iran.

Elites in the republics also recognize that Europe is of critical economic importance to them; yet if Turkey itself is denied entry into the EC, how could Turkey facilitate the republics' ties with Europe? Other states, such as India, are also cautioning the republics not to commit themselves ideologically—either ethnically or religiously—to any bloc but to keep close ties with all states in the region. China is also seen as a critically important trading partner, especially for consumer goods, while the rest of East Asia is the world model par excellence for successful development. Close identification with Turkey is recognized to carry the American imprimatur—not undesirable, but, in the eyes of many Central Asians, a factor complicating other options if the commitment becomes too intense. In other words, they would like to keep all options open rather than commit themselves exclusively to the Turkish connection at this point.

Under these circumstances, Turkey does not yet enjoy a position of monopoly or special privilege in Central Asia, despite its prominence. Indeed, the leadership of Central Asia will continue to be interested in any ties that will be most effective in advancing its economic development. For example, despite their Muslim orientation, both Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan have already established some ties with Israel, falling short of full diplomatic recognition. A senior advisor to President Karimov of Uzbekistan even grew annoyed during an interview in May 1991 when the author referred to Uzbekistan as a "Muslim state"; he responded that Uzbekistan was no more a Muslim state than the United States can be called a "Christian state," and he did not think such appellations were helpful to Uzbekistan's relations with the West. Yet these same Muslim connections can be helpful when the region solicits assistance from the Gulf oil states and Saudi Arabia.

Still, Turkish businessmen themselves are interested in new economic ties in Central Asia. It is important to note that Turkey's population contains Turks from diverse parts of the old Empire who migrated back to Turkey when the new republic was established. In many cases, these Turks of "external background" represent both an elite and a skilled class of former Ottoman administrators. There are also perhaps some 75,000 citizens of Turkey today who fled earlier

from Russian and Soviet Turkestan.¹⁰ These citizens, many of whom still retain knowledge of Central Asian Turkish languages, are well-positioned to act as middle-men in opening up trade ties with Central Asia. They also seek Turkish government support in guaranteeing certain kinds of new trade ties with Central Asia. New publications and organizations also support a new interest in Turkestan. Enterprising businessmen, including those associated with the *Turkiye* newspaper (which maintains a major commercial and business branch) in the summer of 1991 put together a large and impressive full-color catalog of Turkish products presented in both Turkish and Russian that surely must give some kind of edge in Central Asia to Turkish products that are both of good quality and relatively inexpensive. The Turkish government also recognizes that if it does not offer Turkish businessmen any particular incentives, then Turkey may be at no particular advantage in pressing its case in the region unless the Central Asian states themselves decide on a nationalist basis that they wish to give preferential treatment to Turkey. For this reason, Demirel has also spoken of establishing a Turkish Development Bank in Ankara designed to facilitate Turkish trade with the region.

Turkish policy in general toward Central Asia will need to be alert to these new states' own sensitivities. Some Turks in Turkey early on started referring to themselves as the "older brother" (*agabey*) to the Central Asian Turks, perhaps unaware that the Russians from the outset of the Bolshevik period used to refer to themselves as the "elder brother" (*starshyi brat*) to all other nationalities in the USSR, a hated term redolent of the worst days of Russian domination. The Central Asian Turks are decidedly not looking to find a new "elder brother" anywhere at this point. Even the term of "guide" (*rehber*) as applied to the role of Turkey does not sit well, although nearly everyone can accept the term "model" (*ornek*). Turkey will need to avoid any hint of latter-day domination in either the political or the economic realm.

But, over the longer run, Turkey might indeed find a natural market, not only in Central Asia, but in Russia itself. And Turkey has already attracted Russian interest in the character of its own economic "perestroika" under Ozal in the early 1980s, involving establishment of a freely exchangeable currency, the lessening of state controls, a process of privatization, and a new export-oriented economy. Other Turkish businessmen, however, point out that just as trade with the

¹⁰This figure is the estimate of the Turkestan Research Trust [Turkistan Arastirmalari Vakfi] of Istanbul.

Middle Eastern states is highly fickle, trade in Central Asia is still a very iffy proposition, given the rampant economic chaos there, the relative poverty of the republics, and the uncertainty of their own new economic associations. Any Turkish success in the former Soviet Union can really only come when companies band together to try to force open new commercial niches in the rapidly evolving former communist states.

Turkish interest in Central Asia will also extend beyond the former states of Soviet Central Asia into former Chinese Turkestan, or Xinjiang province, in China. That population, primarily Uighur Turks, who are some six million strong, is strongly oriented toward Turkey and other ethnic Turks in the region and feels under greater ethnographic pressure from the Chinese than most of the Central Asian Turks ever felt from Russian power. The Chinese authorities not only are quite capable of absorbing and entirely assimilating the Uighurs, but are actively engaged in the process; Beijing has long been moving vast numbers of Han Chinese to the region to decisively shift the demographic balance, and creating sharp reaction from the Uighurs. The Uighurs are particularly anxious to find external sources of support to help stave off this serious demographic threat, and Turkey is one of the most obvious candidates. Will Turkey wish to pursue this line of policy, or will it value its ties with Beijing more?

The interest in Turkey goes yet further East. Mongolia, which is enjoying its first true independence in several hundred years, is also interested in finding allies to help ameliorate its very exposed position between two major powers, Russia and China, both of which have heavily dominated Mongolia at various times. Turkey has always considered the Mongols ethnically closely linked to Turks; Mongol names are popular among Turks even today. Mongolia views Turkey as one of several potential, distant powers that can help create a broader network of contacts that will help assert the independent character of Mongolia. This kind of geopolitical thinking is still new, and Turkey has so far barely accommodated itself to the new realities in Central Asia, much less in Mongolia. But Mongolia would be a natural extension of the "Turkic continuum" that extends unbroken from Turkey to the far point of Mongolia.¹¹

Turkey's new relationship with Central Asia will not go unchallenged by Iran. Iran has had profound political and cultural influence over Central Asia for over a thousand years. If the administrative language of Central Asia has basically been Turkish, the cultural lan-

¹¹Based on discussions with a Mongol official.

guage was Persian until the Soviet period. Most educated Central Asians have traditionally been bilingual in Turkish and Persian. It is Iran, and not Turkey, that physically borders on Central Asia. Iran believes that it is the "natural" dominant culture in Central Asia. Under the Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran began broadcasts to Central Asia propagating the Islamic Revolution. Today, Iran has a keen interest in establishing political, economic, and cultural influences there. It is most influential in Tajikistan, where the language is very closely akin to Persian; most Tajiks seek to emphasize their Iranian roots to distinguish themselves from the sea of Turks around them.

Despite Iran's commitment to political Islam, it has actually undertaken a rather cautious approach to Central Asia in recent years. It has avoided open support of Islamic politics in the region; its press has been highly restrained on the subject; and there seems to be little evidence of Iranian activism in supporting any kind of Islamic subversion. Iran seems more intent on pursuing state-to-state ties and economic relationships. That is not to say that Iran might not in the future be tempted to support Islamic opposition groups in political showdowns, but there has been very little "export of the revolution" since Khomeini's death and the emergence of an independent Central Asia. Russian specialists in Central Asia say they find little evidence of a negative Iranian role in the region these days and, in fact, comment that Iran seems to be more restrained than Turkey in pursuing its interests in Central Asia.

Iranian competition with Turkey in Central Asia could become more ideological in the future if its relations with Turkey deteriorate elsewhere, especially over Azerbaijan. In that case, Islamic politics might be one of the Iranian instruments to oppose Turkish ("Western" or "Washington's") influence in the region.

Iran will need to be cautious about pursuing any ideological approach in any case because of great concern on the part of all Central Asian leaderships for potential Islamic opposition. Although Iran clearly is perceived as a Shi'ite power, and Central Asia is basically Sunni, Iran believes that its vision of a politicized Islam is relevant to all Muslims. Iran is furthermore in serious competition with Saudi Arabia—its chief ideological rival—in exerting influence in Central Asia. Although Central Asia—with the exception of Tajikistan—has so far shown little sign of Islamic strength in politics, it is far too early to dismiss the prospects for Islamic fundamentalist movements in the area. The attraction and power of fundamentalism will be considerably dependent upon the degree of social, economic, and political tensions that will exist as the region evolves—especially if the

tensions are between Russians and Central Asians. Islam is one of the powerful symbols of the cultural differences between the former Russian overlords and the Muslims of the region. It will inevitably play a role if the politics between Russians and Muslims in the area grow ugly, if the economic situation should deteriorate, or if there is widespread opposition against new authoritarian rule in the republics.

Turkey prides itself as a model of successful secularism in the Middle East. It will undoubtedly view its role in Central Asia as contributing, among other things, to a measured view of Islam in society and politics and for a secular approach to government. Iran will be in a difficult position if Turkey is perceived to be promoting pan-Turkism as its ideological banner against Iran; Iran might then respond with an Islamic banner. Iran is also uncomfortable with the idea that Turkey might leapfrog Iran for influence in Central Asia and seek to extend its influence aggressively. For these reasons, Iran is already competing with Turkey, whether it wants to or not, for a position of influence in the region. If the Islamic politics—in either its state form as urged by the Saudis or its unofficial political form as supported by the Iranians—has any chance of prevailing in the area, Turkey in turn will have even greater interest in promoting secular pan-Turkism as a balancing factor. If Iran can sell Islam, Turkey can sell its secular pan-Turkism. Which will the buyer prefer?

Russia, historically always nervous about Muslims to its south, was acutely sensitive to any pan-Turkist or Islamic trends in the Bolshevik period. That nervousness, while reduced, still continues, even if the Central Asian states are completely independent. While Russia initially had grounds for the first time to look benignly upon Turkish influence in Central Asia, those views are now shifting as Turkey moves more aggressively to supplant Russian influence in the economic, commercial, political, and even military spheres.

Some Russians privately express concern that maybe Ankara has become Washington's chosen instrument for influence in Central Asia or to dislodge and displace Russian influence. To balance this Turkish factor, Russia has been looking more favorably upon Iran, and has even embarked on further arms sales to Iran. While there are good commercial reasons for Russia to make these sales, they also serve as a quiet reminder to Turkey that Russia does not completely welcome aggressive Turkish inroads into Central Asia, even if the Cold War is over.

On the other hand, Russia also fears the extension of fundamentalism into Central Asia as being deleterious to its own position in the re-

gion. If Turkey can serve as a stabilizing force and support a secular approach to politics, its presence is not unwelcome. But aggressive pan-Turkist policies are not much better than Islamic inroads in Russian eyes if the net effect is to dislodge Russian influence on ethnic, if not religious, grounds.

5. TURKEY AND THE CAUCASUS

The Caucasus is another region driven today by volatile politics that had been almost totally quiescent—indeed irrelevant—to Turkish interests and concerns ever since the establishment of the Bolshevik empire. Today, it has emerged with the full force of its conflicting national movements among three new independent states: Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Each of these states is in search of some external ally: Only Turkey and Iran are available to play this role. Only Turkey can serve as an overland lifeline to the West. The greatest single import of these developments is to bring Turkey into conflict with Iran—even if Ankara itself exercises restraint.

ARMENIA

Independence has nearly immediately brought Armenia into a serious strategic impasse. Armenians, for at least two centuries, have looked to Russia as their protector, specifically against the Turks. Now independent, Armenia confronts the reality that it is surrounded by a hostile Turkic Azerbaijan on one side and its traditional Turkish nemesis on the other. Armenia also perceives Moscow to be unsympathetic to Armenian interests in the struggle with Azerbaijan over the autonomous Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is located within the neighboring republic of Azerbaijan. They believe Gorbachev to have been angry at what he perceived as Armenia's early launching of serious ethnic struggle in the USSR when it proclaimed its irredentist interest in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1987—challenging the Azerbaijanis in the process—and thereby taking the first major step toward the eventual breakup of the Union along ethnic lines. Armenia was one of the first republics after the Baltics to declare its firm intentions of independence from the Union, albeit carefully framed within the procedures then set forth by the Soviet constitution. Armenia has consistently been moving to the further conclusion that Russia is no longer a reliable protection against the Turkish threat. While Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh was not foreordained, it was virtually inevitable given Armenia's determination to unite Armenian speaking territory under its own aegis—even where physically separated.

But early in the independence process, the new Armenian leadership, under President Levon Ter Petrosyan, was also coming to recognize that it really has little alternative to normalizing its relations with

Turkey. Impressive bilateral steps of rapprochement were underway between the two countries until intensified violence in Karabakh halted—and perhaps fatally damaged—the process. In April 1991, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, Volkan Vural, made the first visit ever of a senior Turkish official to Armenia to discuss the improvement of bilateral relations.¹ Drafts of a good-neighbor agreement were drawn up, as well as an agreement to initiate direct cross-border trade and to open a highway between the two countries.² Both sides recognized the need to overcome psychological barriers between the two peoples that stem from the massacre of Armenians in Eastern Turkey during World War I. These emotions of hostility are even stronger among the Armenian diaspora than they are in Armenia itself, where some degree of realism about Turkey will require putting aside past grievances to deal with future realities.

Even in early 1991, it was still conceivable that Armenia could actually ask Turkey's good offices to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the Karabakh dispute. Such a request would have put Turkey in a difficult position, in that Turkish nationalists might demand that Turkey support the Azerbaijanis fully in any dispute. On the other hand, for Turkey to demonstrate some even-handedness in the region would have strongly reinforced the overall Turkish role in the Caucasus region, and the extreme nationalists in Turkey could have been largely excluded from voice in the issue. Indeed, in late 1991, Turkey had reportedly urged the government of Azerbaijan to reconsider its decision to abrogate the autonomous status of Karabakh, as a step toward defusing the crisis. But the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement was not to be. Azerbaijan moved to strengthen its own (very weak) military position around Karabakh. Armenia itself, in the spring of 1992, moved to expel all Azerbaijanis from inside Karabakh, massacring an Azerbaijani village in the process, to secure a corridor by military means through Azerbaijani territory to Karabakh and to threaten militarily the Azerbaijani autonomous region (within Armenia) of Nakhichevan, for which Turkey statutorily has some defensive responsibilities in an old treaty with the USSR. The situation had deteriorated too far, and Turkish public opinion overwhelmingly pressed Ankara to speak out firmly against Armenian actions.

At present, Turkey is very hard put to stay neutral in the conflict but has not yet crossed the line of actual alliance with Armenia. Turkey

¹See *Newspot*, English language edition, Ankara, 11 April 1991.

²See *Hurriyet*, 12 April 1991.

has made agreements with Azerbaijan to supply military training and is otherwise engaged in tightening its relations with Baku. The seizure of power by the nationalist, anticommunist Azerbaijani Popular Front in late spring 1992 has brought an even more nationalistically inclined Azerbaijani government to power and rendered the conflict even harder to resolve. Russian Army Chief of Staff General Shaposhnikov has warned that if Turkey entered the conflict it could risk turning into "World War III." Despite the massive hyperbole of such a remark, it reflects Russian concern for the intractability of this conflict and its ability to bring both Turkey and Iran into the conflict.

The Turko-Armenian border may also be a subject of dispute, since Armenian independence opens up at least the possibility of Armenian claims to Turkish soil. Any such possible claims seemed to have been put to rest when Turkey signed a peace agreement with the short-lived independent Armenian republic in 1921 recognizing existing borders and later in the Soviet-Turkish treaty of 1921, which firmly established all borders between the Soviet Union and Turkey. In this treaty, the USSR implicitly spoke for Armenia, overriding any possible independent Armenian position on the border issue. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, of course, Turkey no longer borders on Russia or a Soviet Union; the validity of that treaty and its provisions for local borders with other former Soviet republics fell open to question.³ Turkey cannot hope that any new federal, confederal, or commonwealth authorities in Moscow will be able to speak for the republics at all; Ankara must deal directly with the concerned republics. The problem was exacerbated when the Armenian Parliament announced that it did not recognize those borders established by Moscow between Armenia and Turkey.⁴ Thus, in the spring of 1992, Turkey stipulated that it would not proceed to formalize diplomatic relations with Armenia until Armenia provides formal written recognition of existing borders.

Any realistic government in Armenia is hardly likely to open up old border issues with Turkey in any case, given the extreme importance of a road link to Turkey and the West—especially when Armenia's sole rail links with Russia are permanently subject to closure by Azerbaijan. Armenia will also have interest in access to the Black Sea, which can come only through transit rights into Turkey or through Georgia. Turkey has included Armenia in its Black Sea Consortium scheme, an organization that will provide a regular fo-

³See *Briefing*, 18 March 1991, Ankara, p. 3.

⁴Coskun Kirca, "The Only Hope for Armenia," *The Turkish Times*, 12 February 1991.

rum for Armenian-Turkish consultation apart from any other bilateral relations. Indeed, in late 1991, Turkey had reached tentative agreement with Armenia on building port facilities for Armenian use in the Black Sea port of Trabzon, linked by a road into Armenia. This enlightened policy would have improved Turkish relations with Armenia, as well as subtly increasing Armenian dependence on Turkey in the process. The dominance of Turkey in any new Black Sea arrangements also suggests to the Armenians that quarrels with Turkey, which they cannot in any case hope to win, are hardly in the best interests of the fledgling independent state over the longer run. In late 1991, President Ter Petrosyan had reportedly requested the American Armenian community to moderate its anti-Turkish agitation in the American Congress.⁵ All these promising arrangements fell by the wayside with the intensification of Armenian-Azerbaijani military action in late 1991 and early 1992.

Future Turkish relations with Armenia could be advantageous to Turkey as well as Armenia if they can help bring to a close the virulent anti-Turkish campaigns supported by most Armenians in the diaspora based on their historical grievances. The Armenian community is obviously well placed in both the Middle East and the West, especially in commerce, to assist Turkey. Turkey likewise might wish to avoid complete identification with the Azerbaijani side of the Karabakh issue so as not to further exacerbate its relations with the significant worldwide Armenian community.

Turkish relations with Iran have also been complicated by the Karabakh crisis, since both countries seek an intermediary role between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This facet of the problem will be discussed in the section on Azerbaijan below.

The Karabakh problem therefore has major implications for the future of the Caucasus. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have the full weight of ethnic emotion invested in the issue—redoubled because both are only now emerging from 70 years of incarceration in the Soviet empire, during which nearly all nationalist impulses were stifled. The Karabakh issue produces powerful emotions in Armenia, which is vividly aware of the vast expanse—now lost—of classical Armenia, which in Roman and Byzantine times that extended over large portions of Anatolia. Armenians still suffer from living memory of the more than a million of their people massacred in eastern Turkey at the end of World War I, the flight of vast numbers of oth-

⁵From an American journalist recently examining Turkish-Armenian relations, December 1991.

ers, and a government intent on preserving and strengthening its now shrunken demographic power in the Caucasus. To the Azerbaijanis, the loss of the territory of Karabakh would be an affront to their national dignity, a cancer implanted by Stalin in his redrawing of the Soviet ethnic map in the 1920s, and would represent a capitulation to the Armenians who once were a minority in Baku itself, which dominated the economic life of Azerbaijan at the turn of the century. It is hard to see how the issue will be resolved given the complete zero-sum mentality of both sides.

The only possible hope of compromise might involve exchange of mutual corridors to the Armenian enclave of Karabakh and the Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan, each inaccessible and hostage within the geographical confines to the other state. More pessimistically, perhaps only further bloodletting will bring each party to its senses. If either side is able to take decisive military action and "permanently" resolve the crisis, it will remain a psychic wound embittering and poisoning the politics of the Caucasus for years, a tempting issue for nationalist adventurists of either side to reopen at any time in the future.

The seriousness of the problem has been recognized now even in the West, where CSCE mechanisms and even NATO are engaged in trying to establish a cease-fire and find some kind of resolution, lest the problem spread. From Turkey's point of view, the conflict is a no-win situation. Turkish public opinion sides heavily with Azerbaijan, and any Turkish government is under pressure not to sit on the sidelines as the fighting develops.⁶ Nonintervention by Turkey only stirs up public opinion and gives Iran an opportunity to steal the lead from Turkey and play protector to Azerbaijan. Intervention will be extremely costly for Turkey in its future relations in the Caucasus and with Russia, NATO, and the United States. Hopefully, the problem can be contained by external forces before Turkey is compelled to move fatefully. Much is at stake.

GEORGIA

Turkish ties will also need to be renegotiated with Georgia now that that republic has attained independence. Like Armenia, independent Georgia remains economically highly vulnerable; its land links

⁶Over the short term, Armenia enjoys far better military skills and superior equipment; over the long run, however, if Azerbaijan focuses on the long-term improvement of its military capabilities (with Turkish assistance?), Azerbaijan's vastly greater population and its physical encirclement of Karabakh give it the edge in military resolution.

with Turkey are already of importance in a burgeoning border trade on a private enterprise basis—including Georgian prostitutes now coming across the border to ply their trade in eastern Turkish towns. Georgian purchases of goods bought privately in Turkey have now reached \$15 million per year, and Turkey is increasing the amount of electricity exported to Georgia.⁷ Turkey will be very important to Georgia as an alternative land link to Europe apart from transiting Russia. Its relations in the Black Sea Consortium will also predispose it to good relations with Turkey, given Turkey's immense importance in Black Sea maritime affairs.

Ethnic strife within Georgia itself, however, can affect its relations with Turkey. The Abkhazians, primarily Muslims, are seeking independence from Georgia (which is Christian) and look in part to Turkey for support. The Muslim Ajars, who also have their own autonomous republic on the Georgian-Turkish border, also look to Turkey in their demands for greater autonomy, especially as there are also Ajars who live on the Turkish side. Turkey will probably avoid involvement in these ethnic separatist conflicts, however, and there is little public interest in the fate of these non-Turkic minorities. There perhaps is greater sympathy for the Chechens in the northern Caucasus, who are struggling for independence from the Russian republic, and who have a small population in Turkey, much of which fled over a hundred years ago during the great Chechen uprising against Russia.⁸ Turkey will need to establish how "Muslim" its policies will be in the Caucasus and to determine the extent of Turkish willingness to act as a mediator. Given the volatile nature of Caucasian politics, it is impossible to foresee what kind of strategic relations will exist among its various states and the degree to which Turkey may or may not be drawn into some kind of alliance relationship. If the past is any indicator, Turkey will seek to avoid any entanglements in the highly localized, passionate, and irreconcilable microethnic conflicts in the Caucasian region.

Since Caucasian politics are only beginning to emerge after 70 years of enforced quiescence, the shape of future Caucasian politics and regional alignments is extremely difficult to predict. Some degree of conflict is the only certitude. Iran and Turkey are the only logical major powers in the area to arbitrate regional conflict, apart from Russia itself. Here again, Turkey and Iran may come into rivalry if

⁷See Paul B. Henze, *Turkey and Georgia: Expanding Relations*, RAND, P-7758, 1992.

⁸Henze, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Caucasian states should seek to play Ankara off against Tehran as they pursue their regional aspirations.

THE AZERBAIJAN PROBLEM

If Turkey and Iran are engaged in a rivalry for influence in Iraq and Central Asia, the potential for conflict between Ankara and Tehran is far more serious in the emerging situation in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has been divided into two parts since the early nineteenth century, when Russia invaded the Caucasus and took the northern half of Azerbaijan away from Persia. The southern half of Azerbaijan has remained part of Iran, with its capital in Tabriz. Yet Iranian Azeris, who speak a Turkic language virtually identical to that of Soviet Azerbaijan and very close to the Turkish of Turkey, have long been considerably integrated into Iranian life. Despite their ethnic and religious ties with the Azeris in the USSR, the Azeris of Iran have, for 70 years, had very limited interest in any kind of union with the north because of the undesirable and threatening character of the communist regime in Baku and because of Azeri prominence in all aspects of Iranian society.

But northern Azerbaijan is now on its way to eventual independence. For the first time in nearly 200 years (with the exception of a brief three-year period between the collapse of Tsarist Russia and the reassertion of Bolshevik power in the Caucasus), Azerbaijan now conducts an independent foreign policy, with a new nationalist government in charge since June 1992. For the first time in nearly two centuries, northern and southern Azerbaijan are in a position to increase contacts broadly between themselves. While many Iranian Azeris consider themselves to be first and foremost Iranians, i.e., part of the political and cultural system of Iran, they nonetheless demonstrate an ambivalence about their ethnic identity that, over time, will complicate further their position in the country.

Indeed, the Iranian Azeris are in fact perhaps the only Turks in the world uncertain about their ethnic identity. Some Azeris believe that they are Persians who happen to speak Turkish as a result of a historical accident of occupation by Turks nearly 1,000 years ago. Others believe that they are in fact Turks who have long been socialized into Persian culture and politics. There is no doubt that the Azeris play a prominent part in Iranian culture. At the turn of the century, their capital city, Tabriz, was more advanced than Tehran; it was also the cradle of liberal politics in Iran during the same period. Azeris are represented at the highest levels among the clergy; they

reportedly make up nearly 75 percent of the bazaar in Tehran. They represent close to 25 percent of Iran's population.⁹

The continued evolution of the Iranian Azeris' sense of ethnic identity will depend in part on the policies that Tehran maintains toward Azerbaijan, particularly on the degree of cultural autonomy that Tehran will permit. Iranian Azeris have rarely been accorded the right to publish or to be educated in their own language. And there are differences among Azeris as to how they view themselves. Some say they are basically Turks who wish to express this identity far more openly, even though they do not choose to break away from Iran. Turkish diplomats who have spent time in Tabriz are full of tales of how Azeris consider themselves Turks and feel distinct or even alienated from Persian culture. Other Azeris insist that they are fundamentally Iranian in their overall cultural orientation and that Persian, not Azeri, is their language of education, culture, and communication within the country; that said, they still wish to enjoy linguistic and cultural autonomy in education and other fields and greater independence from Tehran in these matters.

The evolution and policies of an independent Azerbaijan to the north will also greatly affect Iranian Azeris. Members of the Azerbaijan National Front, the leading opposition party over the past several years in Baku and now in power, claim that their ultimate aim is union with the south. They state that they seek to maximize person-to-person contacts with Iranian Azeris, to invite them to the north for visits, family contacts, education, etc., in order to raise their Azeri consciousness. When one points out to them that the union of the two Azerbaijan's entails the partition of Iran, and the almost certain spin-off of the Iranian Kurds as well, one nationalist remarked, "Well, Iran is an empire anyway and the days of empire are numbered."¹⁰ Northern Azerbaijan is especially interested in the immense demographic impact that union of the two Azerbaijanians would have on Azerbaijan's stature in the Caucasus: The population of the south is probably nearly twice that of the north, giving vastly greater clout to a united state and its position in regional politics.

⁹See Patricia J. Higgins, "Minority-State Relations in Contemporary Iran," in *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, edited by Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1986, p. 178. While figures are unreliable, Higgins estimated Azeris to make up 9 million people out of a total population of some 34 million in 1986. Azeris themselves consider this figure to be extremely low and speak of 12 to 15 million.

¹⁰Personal interview with a senior member of the Azerbaijani National Front, September 1991.

The new nationalist president of Azerbaijan, Ebulfaz Elchibey, pursues an openly pan-Turkist policy. He champions close ties with Turkey and the adoption of the Latin alphabet for Azerbaijani Turkish.¹¹ Elchibey is provocatively scornful of the "regime of mulahs" in Iran and predicts the breakup of Iran and the union of the two independent Azerbaijanians.

The presence of Turkey in the region exacerbates the dilemma for Iran. If the Iranian Azeris are in some doubt about their Turkishness, the Soviet Azeris are not, despite the Shi'ite religious link with Iran that most Azerbaijanis share. The press in Soviet Azerbaijan is filled with articles about Turkey and the ethnic ties between the two countries. Here, Persian does not compete with Azeri Turkish; only Russian competes as the major vehicle of international contact. Books in Turkish are beginning to flow into Azerbaijan from Turkey. There is no doubt that the northern Azeris are growing closer to Turkey every day than to Iran. And Iran, sensing the danger of this cultural pull, is seeking to limit contacts over the border and believes that Ankara is secretly encouraging these developments.

Even in the Ataturk era, Turkey had distinct interest in Azerbaijan. When the Turkish-Iranian borders were set in 1932, Turkey made sure that it maintained a tiny piece of land contiguous to the Armenian controlled but Azeri-populated Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan. It was only in March 1991 that the significance of this contiguous land border was realized, when political change in the USSR made it possible for Turkey to build a railroad bridge between the two countries. In that same month, Turkey also inaugurated weekly flights from Ankara to Baku.¹² Turkey was also the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's declaration of independence in November 1991. Apart from its ethnic sympathies for Azerbaijan, the Turkish government was also reportedly concerned that it get the jump on Iran in any rivalry for close relations with Baku. An Armenian business delegation to Turkey, however, told President Demirel that it considered Turkish recognition of Azerbaijan to be "ill-timed," especially because it might encourage Azerbaijan to more aggressive tactics on the Karabakh question.¹³

¹¹Azerbaijan currently uses a modified Cyrillic alphabet, but will return to its original Latin alphabet, in use in the early 1920s in Azerbaijan (before even the Turks adopted the Latin alphabet). This is in distinction to the use of the Persian-Arabic alphabet for writing Azerbaijani in Iran.

¹²"Azerbaijan Bridge Begins in March," *Turkish Times*, 15 March 1991.

¹³"Armenian Special Envoy Brings Message to Demirel," *Turkish Times*, 1 December 1991. Also see "Recognition of Azerbaijan Will Set a Model for Other Republics," *Turkish Times*, 1 December 1991.

This growing common sense of Turkishness with time is bound to spill over into Iranian Azerbaijan and possibly "infect" it with a desire for closer ties with Baku. In short, Iran has nothing to gain and everything to lose from the independence of northern Azerbaijan. Even if Turkey does nothing at all to encourage any separatism in Iranian Azerbaijan, Tehran will inevitably view Ankara as the gainer in the evolving relationships and is already suspicious of Ankara's intentions toward these Turkic populations that so directly affect Iran's territorial integrity.

Indeed, nationalist elements in Turkey do support Azerbaijan's efforts to increase a sense of Turkishness among the Iranian Azeris and to seek union with them, and generally support pan-Turkist policies designed to bring Turkey and the two Azerbaijanans closer together. But there is almost no likelihood that Azerbaijan would ever seek union with Turkey—indeed, it views itself as more advanced than Turkey in education and technical fields, and it would not give up its own independence and sense of cultural distinctiveness, which includes considerable cultural and historical influence from Iran. But should a strongly nationalist government come to power in Turkey at some point, the Turkish government could wield a more official pan-Turkist policy that would further threaten Iran, which also has Qashqai and Turkmen minorities, who are also Turkic, within its borders. The Azerbaijan issue thus seems destined to increase conflict between Turkey and Iran, regardless of what either country does.

If Iran comes to believe that Turkey either directly or indirectly is working to increase a sense of Turkishness in southern Azerbaijan, thereby contributing to the partition of Iran, it will surely use every means at its disposal to prevent that eventuality. Iran could seek to strike back at Turkey by inciting the Kurds in Turkey to greater separatism. It could also attempt to incite the Turkish Alevi population as a warning marker to Ankara. Ankara in any case has no power to stop the development of Turkish consciousness in southern Azerbaijan even if it wished to. The issue will remain one of the most explosive ones in the region.

These factors also complicate Iran's approach to the Karabakh conflict. Iran wants to maintain good ties with Baku and hence finds it useful to offer a mediating role between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Iran also has a large Armenian minority, however, which gives it a special relationship with Armenia. Iranian good offices thus have greater credibility for Armenia than do Turkish good offices, and Iran is anxious to maintain good ties with Armenia. Tehran's dilemma is to decide how far it can go in sympathizing with Armenia before it

loses all leverage in Baku, which is already drifting toward Turkey. If, in the end, Tehran should find Baku implacably hostile in its advocacy of the separation of Iranian Azerbaijan from Iran, Iran will probably lend full support to Armenia in the Karabakh crisis, placing it on a further collision course with Turkey.

Iran, of course, has the geographic advantage of contiguous borders with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, offering Iran more strategic options than Turkey has. This fact has not gone unnoticed in Turkey, where some nationalist commentators have commented on the fact that Armenia and Iran stand in the way of a contiguous belt of Turkic peoples right across Asia. Whether this observation would serve as a basis for pan-Turkist expansionism in Turkey is doubtful, but the ingredients are there for jockeying for position and potential conflict in the future.

U.S. policymakers will, of course, have some interest in the evolution of Turkish policies in the Caucasian region and the potential for conflict, which so far surpasses the embryonic conflict in Central Asia. It is nonetheless important to recognize that nearly all of these issues are of far greater magnitude of importance to Ankara than they are to Washington. During the Cold War America's concerns for the global strategy gave it the ability to powerfully influence Turkish policies in the region that touched American interests. Today, however, many of these issues are far more vital to Turkey than to the United States, giving the United States less clout with Ankara on regional affairs.

Key issues of interest to the United States include:

- Avoidance of major military build-up or armed conflict in the Caucasus
- Avoidance of the emergence of extreme nationalist or extreme Islamic fundamentalist trends in the region
- Turkish willingness and ability to serve as an honest broker in Caucasian or Central Asian political conflicts
- Concern for the likelihood of Iranian-Turkish conflict over the Caucasus and Central Asia.

6. TURKEY AND RUSSIA

The modern Turkish state came into existence at about the same time as the Soviet Union; Turkey's outlook on the world was thus powerfully and continuously molded by the existence of the Soviet colossus to the north until it collapsed in 1991. Today, Turkey's relationship with the Soviet Union has shattered into a number of constituent parts: Where once bilateral relations covered all fronts, Turkey now requires fifteen or more new sets of bilateral relations to cover the newly emerging republics. Significantly, Turkey now no longer even borders on Russia.

Because Russia is still the only truly great power in the region, Turkey will need to focus a great deal of attention on its relations with Russia. Turkey is gradually shifting its priorities away from Russia, however, in its focus on the new Turkic republics of the old Soviet Union. It will be a critical decision for Ankara to decide just if and when to give priority to Russian concerns in these areas over Turkey's own ostensible interests in developing influence. Moscow itself is still in the process of sorting out its own foreign policy interests and has no clear view yet of what Turkish relations should or should not be with the Caucasus and the Turkic republics.

As "new thinking" emerged in the USSR under Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, Russian reactions to Turkish policies were fairly positive.¹ Moscow noted the caution and moderation with which Turkey moved—in sharp distinction to the (mutually rival) policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia, each of which sought to strengthen its position in the Muslim republics through Islamic policies, starting with the Afghan war.

Turkey's influence in the republics of the former USSR is not, of course, limited strictly to the Caucasus and Central Asia. A major Turkic group, the Crimean Tatars, live in the Crimea (and more of them are continuously returning from former exile in Central Asia), a peninsula that today constitutes part of Ukraine but is an object of struggle for influence between a Russian majority and Ukrainian and Tatar minorities. Similarly, the autonomous Tatar and Bashkir region of the Volga region has proclaimed independence from within the Russian republic itself. And the autonomous area of Yakutia in

¹See, for example, Bruce Kuniholm, "Turkey and the West," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1991.

Siberia, rich in minerals, is also populated by the Turkic Yakuts, although they are not Muslim, and their sense of Turkishness is still only weakly developed. All three of these Turkic areas can look to Turkey as a source of at least cultural, if not economic and political, support.

Turkey will need to think very carefully about how to conduct its relations with these regions, especially those within Russia proper, whose separatism is a highly sensitive issue for Moscow. The Demirel government has already chosen to avoid involvement in the quest of the Gagauz² for independence in Moldova, however the fate of that republic is sorted out in the future, despite Turkish popular interest in that group. The Turkish role in the region could still be viewed as somewhat constructive from the Russian viewpoint if Turkey would allow itself to **discourage** Turkic separatist movements in Russia. Turkish public opinion, of course, remains a major question mark for the future: Will the public compel the government to express sympathies for these Turkic peoples inside Russia as well? Will a future extreme nationalist leadership come into being in Turkey in the future that would pursue the cause of the "external Turks" as a leading foreign policy goal?

With the collapse and breakup of the Soviet Union and—at least as important—the death of communism as a hostile ideology, Turkey obviously has less to fear from Russia. With the fading of the Soviet threat to Turkey, Turkey's strategic threat to the Russia as a base of NATO operations also sharply fades. Both states can afford to be considerably more relaxed about each other as potentially hostile geopolitical forces.

Russia, of course, must now calculate her own new national interests. Clouded by 70 years of Marxist-Leninist policies, which dictated that the whole world constituted a field of ideological struggle, Russia now needs to think more seriously about a narrow range of national interests. In effect, one of the worst imaginable disasters has already struck: the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the threat of breakaway movements even within Russia itself. The powerful states on Russia's periphery that could theoretically pose a threat to Russia in the future are China, Japan, and Germany.

But despite the more relaxed character of Russian-Turkish relations today, Russia is uneasy with the growing Turkish eagerness to assume a new strategic role in the old areas of Russian domination. As

²Christian Turkish minority in Moldova, *Gok Oguz* in Turkish—a name highly redolent of the Turkish atavistic past.

noted above, Demirel's call for a possible Union of Turkic States and questions about the wisdom of Central Asia remaining within the ruble zone represent a direct challenge to Russian interests and influence. While global strategic struggle is no longer the issue, classical spheres of influence still are, and Russia is not ready to cede to Turkey all the Muslim regions of the former empire. Russia may well thus overtly pursue more open ties with Iran as a balance to Turkish activities in the Caucasus and Central Asia. And suggestions that the United States may be using Turkey as its vehicle for regional influence also worry the Russians. The Russian-Turkish relationship is therefore still in the process of finding a new equilibrium as both states determine the nature and depth of their interests in these regions and the price they are willing to pay for them.

Turkey, whether it wishes to or not, will be involved in Russia's future relations with China. As world empires break up, China, is hardly immune. The breakaway of the Central Asian states from the Soviet Union directly affects China's minorities. In all probability, the Turkic areas of western China will firmly reassert their longtime quest for independence, most notably the Uighurs and Kazakhs. They will likely seek union or a federal relationship with their coethnics on the Soviet side of the border. Tibet will surely never give up its goal of independence; the more heavily Mongol counties of Inner Mongolia will surely seek to join independent Outer Mongolia. Even Manchuria's ethnic Manchus could seek some kind of cultural autonomy. Russia and Turkey will both have possible intermediary roles to play in the event of such developments, given the Turkic nature of the Uighurs and Kazakhs and the more distant Turco-Mongol relationship. Increased Sino-Russian hostility could well emerge from this process if China believes that Russia might be encouraging parallel breakup of the Chinese empire. Indeed, Russia almost surely will welcome a diminution of China's geographical spread and the resurrection of buffer states between them.

Russian-German relations, too, will involve Turkey indirectly in the Balkans. Relations between those two powers in the Balkans have historically been played out in a triangular relationship with Ottoman Turkey as well. While Turkey no longer has any territorial role in the Balkans, it will likely constitute part of a triangular relationship of political influence in the Balkans in the future, especially if there is renascent Russo-German rivalry there.

How would Turkey align itself in such a situation? The evolution of post-Cold War Balkan politics is, of course, still far too new to make any meaningful determinations. At the moment, it is history that

provides the only clue—and possibly an unreliable one. Slovenia and Croatia would historically seem to be inclined toward Germany, with Serbia and Romania (whose populations are Eastern Orthodox) possibly looking more toward Russia. If a Serbian, Romanian, and possibly Greek grouping might emerge that looks more toward Russia, Turkey might find itself at odds with it, and drift toward a *de facto* convergence of interests with Germany. On the other hand, if Turkey's relationships with Germany tend toward friction over Turkish guest workers in Germany and the Kurdish issue, then Turkey might be more sympathetic to a pro-Russian alignment in the Balkans. These potential alignments can only be speculated about for now.

A key new wild card is Ukraine, which has never in modern times been an independent player in the Balkans. If Ukraine will be inclined to view Russia as its key security threat, it might find itself drifting toward Germany and/or Turkey, as counterweights. Turkey will now have more intimate relations with the Ukraine through the Black Sea Consortium. Lastly, Turkey might find itself champion of a Muslim bloc in the Balkans, which would include Bosnia, Albania, and the Muslims of Macedonia and Greek Thrace. Turkey might support Macedonia in general as an anti-Greek, anti-Serbian element.

Various combinations are possible and have not yet worked themselves out. They will inevitably affect Turkey's relations with Russia; on the one hand, they share a desire to limit the growth of fundamentalist Islam, but on the other they could move toward classic rivalry from the days of the Ottoman and Tsarist empires.

In short, the character of Turkish-Russian relations from a geopolitical point of view will have to be reassessed in light of the major changes that are overtaking them. Indeed, Turkey now has newly constituted buffer states between itself and Russian military power in the Caucasus. From a military standpoint, however, Russia of course remains the main regional threat. While the reduction of strategic weapons in Eastern Europe has reduced the security threat to Western Europe, the problem has not really diminished for Turkey. In fact, the withdrawal of many Soviet strategic weapons and forces beyond the Urals has, if anything, technically brought these forces closer to Turkey. It also means that Turkey can no longer look to NATO to absorb part of a first thrust in the highly unlikely event that the Russian military were to move against Turkey. Indeed, the very causes of war between Turkey and Russia will have nothing to do with NATO, but most likely with Caucasian or Central Asian politics.

If NATO has benefited from Turkey's presence in the Alliance, Turkey in turn has certainly strongly benefited from that same membership; few other associations could have as quickly brought Turkey into the "European club" as NATO. With the Soviet threat receding, Turkey nonetheless feels that it is left exposed to security problems in its southeast region: from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Kurdish problem. The prospects of realistic hostilities with some of these states are far greater than they ever have been with the USSR. It is in this area that Turkey is increasingly concerned about what the nature of NATO obligations to Turkey will be in the next decade vis-à-vis threats from the southeast. Russia, as a security consideration, is significantly fading from the picture. And Western Europe will be increasingly shy of any commitments to Turkey involving Turkish policies in the East.

In fact, Turkey is now much more interested in the potential new economic relations it can establish with Russia. After a long-standing total annual volume of trade over the years of some \$600 million, Russian-Turkish trade tripled to \$1.8 billion in 1990 and is expected to reach \$2.3 billion in 1991. Turkey hopes to attain a total annual volume of trade of \$15 billion by the end of the decade.³

The heart of the new trade relationship is an offset gas agreement by which Turkey imports Soviet natural gas for hard currency, "in return for which the USSR is obliged to import Turkish goods and contracting services up to a minimum of 70% of the payments for gas." The remaining 30 percent goes to repay Turkish loans to the USSR. This arrangement will involve \$700 million annually by 1993. Turkish contracting in the USSR has boomed, with a total value of \$1.5 billion to be reached by mid-1992, some of it involving high-profile buildings in Moscow. Turkey is also involved in providing the USSR with turnkey factories, construction materials, pipes, and up to 20 percent of Soviet communication lines via Turkey's telecommunication industries. Ship-building is growing, as is the sale of products from multinational corporations based in Turkey that produce, for example, processed food, pharmaceuticals, packing material, cleaning products, and busses. Joint ventures in tourism, transportation and other areas are under way. By mid-1991, Turkey had provided \$1.35 billion in loans to the former USSR.⁴

³The data in this paragraph and most of the next are taken from "Economic Relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union," by Nihat Gokyigit, Cochairman of the Turkish-Soviet Business Council, presented in a report to the Turkish-U.S. Business Council in New York on 31 October 1991.

⁴Ibid.

Turkey is additionally seeking to present itself to the West as a trade partner for other countries in arranging trade and investment with the former Soviet republics, especially in the Muslim republics. Turkey advertises its geographic proximity, its major Black Sea port facilities, its linguistic and cultural familiarity with those regions, as well as its own experience in undergoing a "perestroika" in the last decade of privatization and opening to international markets—a process in which Turkey has come a long way in developing its own entrepreneurial expertise.⁵

Apart from direct trade with the USSR, the proposed creation of a Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone has been among the various creative ideas that Ozal has developed for the economic future of the region. This zone includes all the riparian countries of the Black Sea and involves at least six countries, including the newly established Ukraine and Georgian independent republics and even the possibility of some kind of new Tatar entity in the Crimea.⁶ Trade with the Ukraine would seem to be particularly promising in the development of Black Sea trading patterns. Gorbachev has explicitly mentioned the Black Sea project in positive terms.⁷

In sum, Turkey's relationship with the Soviet Union has been utterly transformed in the last five years with the elimination of mutual hostility, the disaggregation of Turkey's relations with a Soviet Union to one of individual relations with Russia and the various republics, and the opening of new trade relations in a rapidly evolving new market system in the former USSR. Turkey should loom large in the future economic patterns of Russia and the southern republics, including the Ukraine.

Turkish foreign policy thus must find a new balance in its relations with Russia. If Turkey pursues its traditionally sober and measured foreign policies (Cyprus being the major exception in which Turkey opted for unilateral action as opposed to international due process), it can be expected to avoid involvement in internal disputes in the former Soviet Union. Indeed, Turkish diplomats might expect to be busy with a multiplicity of mediation roles in the region in the coming

⁵This experience in developing a new-found entrepreneurial expertise is very significant not only for Turkey but for other Third World states that were long viewed as having no "entrepreneurial tradition." Commerce in the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish republic was very much in the hands of minorities, usually Christian. Turkey's newer generations are now completely at home in the world of commerce.

⁶"Black Sea Prosperity Zone' Agreement to be Signed in April," *The Turkish Times*, 15 January 1991.

⁷*Economist Foreign Report*, 11 April 1991, p. 6.

decades, especially if it can maintain the image and role of an objective and balanced party. At this point, Turkey is undergoing a dramatic shift away from its traditional Ataturk-style isolationism. It is now in the process of becoming a potential competitor in the region, adding to, rather than tempering, regional nationalist sentiments. Given the swirl of rising nationalisms worldwide, it is not impossible that some future Turkish leader might find benefit in playing some kind of pan-Turkist card down the road. These nationalist tendencies do exist in Turkey, but they have not become part of mainstream politics. As long as Turkey continues to enjoy economic progress and is integrated into Western trade patterns (even if not as a formal member of the EC), the emergence of nationalist-chauvinist patterns out of Turkey does not seem very likely, even as Turkey's regional role grows.

7. CONCLUSION

World events, as well as the evolution of Turkish domestic policies, all conspire to give Turkey a new prominence in international politics and a higher profile in the Middle East and the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union and China. While Turkey has traditionally avoided this kind of involvement, those policies will come under pressure for change, both from an economic point of view and because other Turkic areas will seek Turkish ties and support. As a major power in the region, Turkey will inevitably also need to concern itself more with events in the Arab world, Iran, and Israel. As Turkish interests and clout grow, one can only hope that Turkey will continue to bring to its foreign policy the sobriety and responsibility that have largely marked its policies since the establishment of the Turkish Republic after World War I.

Turkey almost surely will turn greater attention to the politics of the Middle East in the decade ahead. This change will be determined by many factors: economic need; EC rejection of Turkish membership, causing Turkey to seek alternative spheres of influence; new opportunities for ties with the Caucasian and Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union; increased turmoil in the Persian Gulf; and the gradual withering of Atatürkist isolationism.

The world itself continues to undergo profound change. It is a world in which we see simultaneous tendencies of breakup and unification. It promises to be a long period of confusion and turmoil, one hopes, not exploited by any single new ideological state or force in the world which would serve to polarize these trends.

Turkey itself is in the middle of that kind of world today. It may be among those "losing" states, in that it may be deprived of a large hunk of its territory if a new Kurdish national movement comes into being that seeks to remake the regional map. On the other hand, Turkey will also be among the potential "gainers" if the newly emerging Turkic world will bring it new power and influence over a broad stretch of the globe. How will Turkey perform in this role?

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